

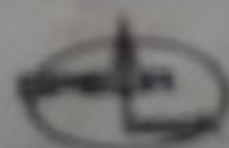
Dar es Salaam By Night

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Chapter 1

SHE examined the girl who stood in front of her in the life-sized mirror. She carefully admired the slender, shapely toes standing out of the equally beautifully shaped feet; she feasted her eyes on 'the other girl's' fleshy thighs and bottom, her slender waistline that would captivate any man. Still looking at the 'girl in the mirror', she noted with pleasure her firm breasts which mocked her age and a face that resembled that of a maiden, unspoilt and pure in her innocence. Her expert eyes also took in the pile of black and beautiful hair that covered her head and ringed that beautiful looking face. She smiled. The smile was sweet and enchanting and would have mesmerized any man.

Rukia Komba smiled again. She was certain that what she had been witnessing in the mirror - her own image - was one of the master - pieces of the Creator. She recalled a poem that had asserted that a beautiful woman was like "a rose in a forest of thorns." She couldn't have agreed more with the poet. How could one have expected the world to be relieved of its monotony, or life of its weariness, without beauty? Without beautiful creatures, that is? And who could be more beautiful than herself? She felt an urge to laugh out aloud. She was alone in the room; it was all hers today. The man she had brought in had tickled her body as was his habit, tickled and felt it with his fingers while sweating like one cultivating land, then left after promising to be with her again tonight. What revolted Rukia about this man was his empty promises. This was the third time! He would come, have his fun to the fill, and then leave without the tokens of appreciation that were her lifeline.

When she first saw him she had fallen for him after seeing the way he ordered beers; it was as if he had all the money in the world. And not only beer: he would order roast chicken now and again and generously tip the barmaids. Rukia had thought a man like that would satisfy her lust for money. But he had disappointed her that very first night. On the second she would have hesitated taking him in again, but then she had been won over by his bragging about the high position he held in the country and the many gifts he would give her on returning from his many trips to Europe. She had found herself not asking for money.

It was this failure to win any financial rewards from this man that had made her spring naked out of her cosy bed and stand before the mirror. Doubts had begun to assail her. Could it be she was beginning to age? Was her beauty disappearing? As early as this...? But the mirror had reassured her. She was sure of being still a treasure in the eyes of men. Her anger melted. *But this man!* Perhaps he was one of those difficult ones. Or perhaps there was something wrong with him.

"Let him be difficult... let something be wrong with him," she whispered to herself. "With me he will have to know his limits! I'll show him that Rukia is not a toy for men. He'll regret for this trickery! And if he's not careful enough, I'll milk money from him so fast that he'll be compelled to pawn his very pants! I don't care what he is... whether he be Minister or Ambassador!" She paused and looked at herself again in the mirror. "Oh, yes, tonight! Hasn't he promised! Let him try it again!"

Ten years ago a young, beautiful girl dressed in rags was hanging around drinking places in search of men to hire herself out to. Her eyes were haggard with sorrow and her dress so nondescript that even potential customers hesitated at first glance. But it was not exactly her shabbiness and sad face that made men shun her; rather it was her age. Of course every man would like to have a

young girl, but not that young. Her full breasts did not deceive the men; they knew she could hardly be ten.

But the girl would not let her age come between her and her determination to make a living. Suppose she gave consideration to her age: what then would she eat? For three days now her tummy had known no food. Her mother had again run away, deserting her. And this time she had despaired, for her mother had been seen boarding a bus bound for Nairobi, so far away in Kenya, and they said her companion had been a white man. Twice in the past she had disappeared like that, but she had come back and embraced her, crying: "Child, forgive your mother." This time she had wept before running away. After wiping her tears she had told her daughter: "Listen to me, Rukia... you are now a grown up woman, just like me. It's not proper for me to hire myself out to men in your presence. I can't go on doing it, for your own sake and mine. Learn to live. You have an attractive figure and hot blood. You'll do better than me, your old mother." The following morning she had packed her belongings and left.

When her mother's "customers" came looking for her they found the daughter. They looked longingly at her, but her tender age somehow put them off. Her childhood and innocent white eyes seemed to scare them.

But there was one thing people did not know: that although she looked like a child she knew everything. As soon as she had grown old enough to learn, she had observed her mother playing with men who threw her into the bed on her back or on her belly, whatever posture the customers preferred. This had at first scared her as she heard her mother cry as if in pain. But later she had discovered that those cries were different, since the way she cried on these occasions was different from the way she did that night when one of her customers physically assaulted her, spraining her ankle and knocking out her tooth.

Long before that this young girl had actually tasted what was like food to her mother. There was that son of their neighbour, a young boy slightly older than her. Whenever they were alone they would shut themselves up in a room and enact what their mothers did openly. Then there was that day she was late in returning home. On the way she had met two drunk young men who had wrestled her to the ground and taken turns forcing themselves onto her. She thought she now knew what men did to her mother. On that occasion she had felt a solid object glowing with a strange warmth pass between her thighs. At first she had sensed an acute pain. Then the pain had subsided and in its place there came a sensation of comfort and gratification. The second youth's thing was firmer. It had surprised her to find that she preferred this second one; she had found herself embracing him and feeling his body with her fingers. Since then she had matured and gained experience in these things. But it remained her secret, and in the eyes of most people she was only a child. Yet she was fully prepared for the bewildering world of commercial sex.

Now that her mother was no more with her, the time had come to advertise her experience and silence those who regarded her as a child. It was an absolute necessity if she was to make a living. The mere four years of primary education she had received would not get her anywhere. Had those with a better education found jobs? And even if she was to be lucky enough to find employment, how would the minimum wage help her when those in high income brackets were going to bed hungry? No. There was only one job open for her - prostitution. It was the only job in which she could bring out her efficiency and skill!

She was determined. She began to look for men in drinking places. She lured them with her eyes and sweet words. But many were still put off by her tender age. Those who had ordered their beers took their eyes off her and resumed their drinking and those

already paired off paid attention to their women. Not one of them seemed prepared to pay attention to this creature inexperienced in the ways of the world. Not one of them wanted to risk being covered with the shame of having slept with a minor.

With the exception of one man. He was new to Mwanza and to this particular drinking place. Tonight was his third visit to this joint. But he was not new to matters of illicit sex and sin. He had the money to spend; his problem was on whom to spend it. When drinking alone he could not manage a second bottle, but with a beautiful woman at his side he could down ten at a wink. Since his arrival in this place his eyes had admired many women who patronized it, but he had slept with only two.

He felt shortchanged: two women were not enough for the man he was. He needed variety in body shape and style. Thus today, having secured a place at a corner of the drinking house, his eyes roved all over the place in search of a willing partner. He had not made his choice when all of a sudden this young girl appeared. The shabbiness of her clothes and gloomy appearance barely concealed her potential beauty. He was not seeing her for the first time. Last night he had observed her hunting with her eyes in the same place. Now he noticed something else about this young, beautiful girl. Hunger. Her face told it: she was starved of food and not men. She had either eaten very little or not at all in the past two days or so. He felt himself moved to pity. He beckoned a waitress and ordered a meal of chicken, potato chips and soft drink for her.

When the food was taken to her, the girl gazed at the waitress in surprise. Her questioning eyes made the waitress point out who among the patrons had ordered the food. She turned to look at her benefactor and their eyes met. He was a full grown-up with an admirable physique, who was expensively dressed and appeared to have much money to spend. She smiled at him. It appeared to

catch him off-guard. He seemed not to have expected this poor girl to be capable of a smile so coquettish and seducing.

He also least expected what happened next. In a swift move the girl had carried her food over and joined him at his table. She continued seducing him with her smile.

"I don't know how to thank you," she said. Although her voice was hardly above a whisper, the man detected its bewitching quality.

"Just go on eating."

"Not now," she replied. "Later perhaps. They call me Rukia. What's yours, sport?"

"Eat first," the man insisted and then paused. He was surprised to find the girl's palm on his thigh, massaging it. "Listen..."

"I'll do that," she said, "but allow me to show you how grateful I am." Her fingers explored his thigh and reached the fly of his trousers where they began playing with the buttons.

The darkness in their corner shielded them from the gaze of most of the other patrons in the bar, but one or two noticed them and smiled mischievously. The man felt foolish. He looked at the girl whose fingers had now reached where she had intended them to while whispering to him, "Allow me..." He looked around and noticed that more patrons were looking in their direction. He felt a surge of shame and involuntarily his hand struck out. The slap caught the girl smack in the face. She went off balance and crashed down. The man gave her a contemptuous look and then said, "You're mad," loudly for the benefit of all the patrons. Then he rose to his feet and left. As he went he fought a temptation to look back, while everybody in the bar laughed.

Rukia did not shed even a single tear. She simply pulled herself together, rose to her feet and dusted herself before following the man.

He drank his second cup of the black coffee more slowly, fearing that he might finish it before the arrival of the man with whom he had made the appointment. He recalled that in his shirt-pocket he had no more than one hundred and twenty shillings. If he went on ordering the bitter coffee he would be like one committing suicide. He did not know when he would earn his next cent.

He went on drinking slowly, now and then taking a look at his watch. His date was already late by twenty minutes. Or had Hasira lied to him? Had he ever lied to him? Or was he delaying his arrival deliberately to show him that he, Hasira, was now well-off? "*It can't be that,*" he told himself. "*It would be quite unlike him.*"

He took his eyes off the watch and surveyed the coffee bar. Patrons were huddled in groups at tables. What was special about this place was that everyone here was smartly dressed. Everyone looked relaxed and confident as if without a care in the world.

Hasara, distracted momentarily from the anxiety of waiting for Hasira, laughed in his heart. He remembered an article he had read in one of the papers about this coffee bar and its patrons. "*One important rule to be observed by the patrons of this coffee bar,*" the article had said, "*is dress. A proper and decent costume earns you a place in the bar, while improper attire would see you turned out.*"

And it was true, Hasara observed. Any visitor to Dar es Salaam would not fail to respect the customers of this beer hole, their manner of dressing suggesting that they were people who mattered in the country.

Hasara however knew the place better. His eyes had detected some people he knew among the patrons crowding the bar. He

knew them to be black-marketeers, saboteurs, prostitutes and confidence tricksters, their crimes and the emptiness of their lives deceptively concealed by their clothes.

He took his eyes off the other people and looked at himself. He was overtaken by that feeling that tortured him whenever he found himself in the company of other men, one of diffidence and inadequacy. He examined the pair of trousers he was wearing. Anybody who saw it would at first glance conclude it was very expensive, but Hasara knew it was not. Just like the shirt he was wearing it had been bought cheap from second-hand clothes dealers at Manzese who sold clothes from abroad whose original owners had either died or donated them to help Africa's 'poor'. His shoes gave the illusion of being expensive, but the fact was that he had bought them at a tenth their real value from cunning boys who stole them from shoe shops. (Their trick was to hoodwink the shop-keepers into believing they were genuine buyers and, while negotiating for the price of goods worth three hundred shillings, others would secretly bag shoes worth ten or twenty thousand shillings.)

Wearing clothes that once belonged to a dead man he never knew, scrounging for meals and eating whenever his luck was on like a bird, respecting men who were not worth the respect and fearing others whom he in reality needed not fear were the things that tortured Hasara's person more than his starvation. It was a shuddering thought that he did not know when he would rise above this level of deprivation.

How long he had existed under such circumstances was still hazy in his mind. All he knew was that as soon as he had gained an awareness of his existence he had found himself among dirty, poor children who lived on picking dumped leftover food from dustbins. Sometimes these children fought for food with stray dogs and

cats. They fought amongst themselves too, something that sowed seeds of hatred and suspicion among them.

At that time he did not even know his own name. It made him wonder to hear his mates being called by name while the only label attached to his person was 'You'. The one who seemed older and the leader of the gang he was in was called Hasira (meaning hot temper). It was only Hasira who seemed to take pity on him.

Hasara, the once nameless boy, now remembered how Hasira had one day broken him a slice of dry bread out of pity. The bread was nearing decay, but it was at least something with which to allay the hunger in his stomach.

One day Hasira had come up to Hasara and said "You... for how long do you think we will continue calling you 'You'?"

Hasara had not understood.

"What's your name?"

"Name?" Hasara had remarked, not comprehending.

"Yes... Everybody has that."

"But I have none..."

"You must have one. Find something to be called by."

"I don't know any."

"Then we shall call you Hasara?"

"Hasara?"

"Yes. Means loss. From today on you'll answer to that.

O.K.?

The name had stuck. To Hasara in those days there seemed to be no better life than the one he was leading. It surprised him to see that some of his agemates were different and cleaner, had better clothes and were more cheerful. Those better-off children would come to boo at them whenever they fought for discarded fruits in the dustbins. One of them once threw a coin at the scavenging boys and laughed when he saw them fight for it. Money! To be

thrown away just like that! And Hasara had found it strange that a child like him should show such a carefree attitude towards money, as if he had a lot of it. He remembered the fight that had ensued when they fought for a shilling that they had found in one of the dustbins. One of them had come out of the fight with a broken face. And here was a child who did not fight for a shilling but had enough money to throw away just like that!

He had asked Hasira who was now like an elder brother to him about this. Hasira seemed to have been angered by the question.

"Are you still so young?" Hasira had asked him, fixing him with a hostile gaze. "Why do you think we call you Hasara? Have you ever heard of anybody else called by that name? Had you been someone, the son of a man, you would have lived like those rich children. You'd have eaten better, slept better and put on better clothes. You'd be going to school and leading a decent life. You wouldn't be sleeping in dirty street corners and scavenging for food like a dog!"

This had been a new, deep wisdom for Hasara. It was then that he had begun to meditate on the kind of life he was leading. Yes, it was not the kind of life meant for a man. Look at the way he and his mates were fighting with dogs for food. Look at the food they were eating, the kind of food already discarded by decent human beings! Look at the rags they were wearing. Look at their lair at the street corner where they slept and where they were exposed to rain and cold just like wild cats!

It was then that he had begun to ask himself questions that had never bothered him before. Who was he and how did he find himself in this demeaning kind of life? And just why did God condemn him to live in such poverty? Why was he born at all? Who was the man who fathered him and then abandoned him to lead the

life of the scum of the earth? And who was the woman who mothered him and later abandoned him without even the slightest grain of sympathy?

For the next few days Hasara had been very sad. He thought life was a needless torture. All this had lain heavy on his little mind. Sometimes in his grief tears would roll down his face. But that grief had drawn no sympathy at all from his friends who never bothered even to comfort him. By giving in to grief, they thought him the biggest fool they had ever seen. It was Hasara who had chided him. "A man's tears are worth nothing," he had told him "Only women gain something from shedding tears. You seem to have been born a man by mistake. Unfortunately you cannot change your sex now. The only thing you can do is struggle. Never mind the crumbs you're eating; eat them just to keep your body and soul together until you're grown up. And when you have grown up do all you can to deliver yourself from this kind of life. There are many ways in which you can do this, but all of them require real struggle. Do all you can and you'll liberate yourself."

It had been a short speech, but effective. It had re-kindled hope in Hasara. He had begun to dream of the day he would lead a decent, promising life. So he went on eating filth. It did surprise him to learn that some of his mates knew their parents. The parents of some of them had died; others were alive, but were condemned to begging just like themselves. It was only him who did not know who his parents were.

"So there are grown ups living just the way we do?" he had once asked. But instead of answering his question, his friends had just laughed at him.

"Are you dreaming?"

Hasara started out of his reverie. He was not aware that Hasara

had already arrived and was seated in front of him. He collected himself together and sat up.

"Just what was biting you?" Hasira asked him again. "You seemed to have been lost in some kind of thought."

Hasara did not reply. His attention had been drawn by the other man's clothes. He had of late known Hasira to be in the habit of wearing expensive clothes; but this night he was in his best. A grey light suit, complemented by a red tie, black shining shoes and a watch of its own kind sparkling on his wrist - these made him look as if he had just flown in from Paris. Hasara tried to estimate the value of the clothes and put it at about one hundred thousand shillings. You could hardly imagine that only a few years back this man was wearing rags and eating crumbs of food salvaged from dustbins!

"I must apologize for being so late," Hasira said after Hasara had failed to answer his initial questions, "It was only the caring concern of some smart boys which saved me. I had to hail a taxi to this place. I detected the puncture at the Salender bridge."

So he had a car! Hasara was wonder struck. He still had not found the voice to answer his friend.

"Get up and let's go," Hasira told him and led him by the hand out of the bar. "We'll have a private talk. I don't want anybody to hear a word of it so we'll talk as we walk along."

They walked along Samora Avenue. Instead of the private talk he had promised, Hasira was now talking excitedly of their childhood. He recalled how they used to fight for rotten garbage in the dustbins, how they went to sleep hungry in open places at street corners. "We were not different from dogs," he said and laughed. He sounded as if he cursed the memory and wanted to get Hasara to agree with him that those were the most shameful days of their lives.

But Hasara did not see the fun about his past life. The one he was currently leading was very near to the one he had led in his childhood, with only a slight difference. He still depended on luck to earn his daily bread, and his whole life depended on the vagaries of fortune. He still saw many children living the way he did and many adults roaming the streets begging. He also knew of families which were so poor that their members went without food, sometimes for three days in a row. Children from such families went half-naked. Yet he also knew of rich people who juggled money like they do poker-cards and had more than they could spend. He was among the unfortunate. How then could he join Hasira in deriding his past?

As if reading Hasara's thoughts, Hasira asked: "Do you remember the advice I gave you when we were young children?"

Even before Hasara could answer, he hastened to add: "*There are many ways in which a man can deliver himself from poverty. They all involve struggle. Don't you remember?*"

"I remember you told me something like that," Hasara said.

"I have something to add to that today. I want you to do all you can to deliver yourself from this life of misery." He paused. "Look at me, your comrade. I stuck to this principle of struggle. Today I'm better off. Get it from me that among the storey buildings being erected in the new suburbs of Kimara and Sinza, one will be owned by me. I'm certain of it. I have even got a plot for my proposed apartment."

Hasara's eyes popped out in amazement.

"We started off in this life together, Hasara, didn't we?" Hasira went on, "That is why I can't abandon you. You and I must tread the same path to prosperity. That is why I was looking for you. I've got some small job for you. You'll be surprised at the income you will earn from it. Then I'll show you ways of hastening your

ascent to prosperity."

"What type of job is this?"

"Don't rush me."

They had now reached the Askari monument that was situated at the junction of Maktaba and Makunganya streets in the centre of the city. They seemed not to notice the monument, which they had seen many times before especially during their sad childhood. Hasira's eyes were fixed in front of him and it was obvious that he was lost in thought. Hasara on the other hand had his eyes fixed on the wares displayed in the shop windows, and he marvelled at their impossible prices. He saw a shirt selling at 7,200/-, a pair of trousers at 14,700/-, and a watch at 26,300/-!

"Let's go into this shop," Hasira said all of a sudden.

They went in, although Hasara was hesitant.

"How about this shirt?" Hasira asked him.

"Marvellous."

"And what about that pair of trousers?"

"Fabulous. But the price...!"

"Which pair of shoes do you find attractive?"

"This one, but who on earth can afford that price?"

For an answer, Hasira barked an order. A shop attendant answered the order and brought all the articles Hasara had thought impossible to buy. Hasira proceeded to pay for them and said they were for him. To bewilder Hasara more, he also ordered some for himself. When they left the shop Hasira had three bundles under his arm and Hasara two.

Outside, Hasara was given no chance to ask questions. Hasira thrust five hundred shillings into his hands with the suggestion he should take a taxi to his place. Then he hopped into one of the yellow-lined cabs parked in front of the shop and waved him farewell, wearing a broad smile.

For some time Hasara remained stunned. What was the meaning

of it all? Then he too made for another taxi and entered.

"Magomeni, please," he said as he placed one parcel on his lap.

"Which Magomeni?" the driver asked.

It was then he studied the driver for the first time. He was old enough to be a grandfather, the kind who made you ashamed of haggling for a cut in the fare. Hasara was not used to taxis but he could not back out now. Furthermore, he had the money.

"Magomeni Mikumi," he said

Peterson was impatient. The minute hand of his watch seemed to have stopped. Whenever he looked at it it seemed to be playing some strange trick, giving the impression of having stopped at some hour. It was as if the watch was mocking him! He wondered if the sun was also not playing the same trick on him. Whenever he looked out of the window it seemed to remain in the same position, just a little above the western sky. *Just what was happening?*

But nothing had stopped - both the watch and the earth were rotating as usual. It was Peterson's own anxiety that made them seem as if they had stopped. He wanted the hours to rush, the sun to sink rapidly and the night to set in immediately. Yes, he was longing for the night, when he would go to pick up that new girl!

Just what was the name...? He cursed himself for not remembering it. Something like Rais, Rufia or Rukia. But it was not his forgetting the name that was bothering him. Rather, it was the fact that he was increasingly getting emotionally tied to the girl. She was not the first he had an extra-marital relationship with; she could be the hundredth or more. But it bothered him to realize that he hankered so much after her presence and thought of her more often than he ever did any other woman. He wondered what had bewitched and made him so attached to the girl.

She was beautiful, no doubt, and her manners graceful and enchanting. But that did not mean she was the most beautiful he had seen or the most accomplished in love-making. How come then that he, Peterson the son of Peter, he who had caused grief to many a woman by ditching them at will, should come to fall head-over-heels in love with this particular girl? Or was old age creeping in on him? Why should his emotions start to be deeply affected by a girl so young? He could not explain why, but he had this desire to give her something for which she would always remember him. The thought had crossed his mind to buy her a car or build her a house.

To build a house for a prostitute! Once again the thought frightened him as it always did. Wasn't it the beginning of his disintegration? Was there a difference between building a prostitute a house and selling your own house to get the money to spend on a woman? A wry smile broke on his face.

"What's amusing you?" his wife asked him.

It was then he remembered he was sitting on the same couch with his wife. Enraptured in thought, he had forgotten all about her. He took his eyes off the daily newspaper he had been pretending to read and looked at his wife. She was beautiful and still young. Two child-births and a third on the way had done nothing to diminish her youthfulness.

It was unlikely that she was going to lose her physical charms soon. That was almost impossible when she had everything she wanted. She had since childhood been spoon-fed and received her education in the best of international schools. As if that was not enough, she had hooked a husband who satisfied all her material needs. The double storey house in which they lived reverberated with the sound of music and the hustle of servants. The intense heat of Dar es Salaam did nothing to lessen the cosiness of the

house which was equipped with the latest air-conditioning gadgets. Surrounding the house were carefully planted flowers which were the envy of every passer-by. Within the perimeter of the compound were two water pools, one for swimming and the other for rearing fish in. Inside the house there was still another one, albeit smaller, for husband and wife. They also owned three reliable and sound saloon cars - a Mercedes Benz, a Peugeot 505 and a BMW - all parked below in the garage. The children were healthy, intelligent and attended the best schools. Sonny, the elder of the two, was about to be flown to Britain to attend school there. What else was needed to make a woman happier in this world?

"You seem to be lost in thought these days, darling," his wife said facing him.

Peterson continued to stare at her, realizing for the first time the folly of abandoning a beautiful wife like this for a street girl. But what about her frigidity in bed? Frigidity? Was it what made her remain inactive while he vainly worked himself silly to arouse her desire? Wasn't it because she did not love him enough to respond gratefully to his advances? Yes, he now reasoned to himself. That was why he sought pleasure outside his marriage! He found those other women more enthusiastic and eager to please him. Now sex outside marriage had become a habit, like second nature.

"Lost in thought?" he responded to his wife's observation. "Not at all." He looked at his watch again; the hands were moving after all! "Just what could I be thinking of, darling?" He smiled "What more could I ask God for than having you?" And he went on to recount other blessings he had received from God: the good house, healthy children and cars. He ran his arm around his wife's neck and drew her close. He kissed her. The kiss seemed to please and surprise her at the same time. She could not remember when he

had kissed her last.

"Not here, please... the children are coming..."

"What more could I ask from God...?"

Yes, he had every reason to ask that question. He had always lived as if in the Garden of Eden. Ever since his childhood he had lived in a palace-like mansion and led the life of a king.

His father, Mr. Peter, was a man respected in Dar es Salaam and elsewhere in the country besides having many friends outside the country. His house saw many visitors who came to discuss one subject only: money. Mr. Peter himself also travelled widely and whenever he returned he had surprise presents for his son, Peterson. He even taught the child how to write out a cheque when he was only seven years old. In his travels abroad, the old man sometimes took the child with him and acquainted him with conferences. And although the child was still too young to understand, he was more than proud of being counted among those big men.

He had always heard the names of some of these high-riding men being mentioned in radio broadcasts and seen them written about in the newspapers. All the servants in the house seemed to respect Peterson just like they did his father, on occasion even more. Perhaps this was because of the father's unlimited devotion to his son. He was the only child and Mr. Peter had no wife to give him more. It seemed he never intended to marry; nor did the question of marriage ever feature in his conversations. It seemed that all his life was centred around his son.

Despite the luxury that surrounded him, however, one question nagged young Peterson's mind. It had been aroused after visiting some of his friends and seeing them enjoying their mothers' love. He had never known his mother. It was then that he felt something

was missing in his life. He felt like a man who had a shirt on but no trousers. He felt he was going about among people half-naked. So one night he confronted his father with the question, "Where's my mother?"

The question threw his father off balance, as if he had not expected it. The way he looked at the son left no doubt he did not like it. Although he had always known the question was coming, he had somehow assumed it would not be as early as this.

"Why do you ask that question? Of course you have a mother like all the rest."

"But where is she?"

Mr. Peter drew his child close to him and caressed his head. "My son," he began in a kindly tone, "if you have begun asking a question like that then you're grown up. You better then be prepared for what I'm going to tell you." He paused. And then slowly, very slowly, he told Peterson: "You have a mother like all the rest. Unfortunately she died while giving birth to you."

The boy was however too young to understand death. Innocently he asked his father: "Do you mean I can't go where she is and see her even for once?"

"When someone dies," Mr. Peter had explained, "you cannot see her. And it is not good to mention her in your conversations. It is taboo to speak of the dead."

Chapter 2

YET another night had set in. Like all nights in urban centres its desolation was relieved by scenes of merry-making and pleasure-seeking. All around the city centre lights of various colours chased darkness from the window-shops and the streets turning the night, which would have been frightfully dark in the rural areas and the city slums, into a time of gaiety.

This night like all the rest found pleasure-seekers in Dar es Salaam, old and young, at various night spots. Bars were noisy with drinkers. Dance halls had their share of the nocturnal crowds and the cinemas were just as lively. Prostitutes hung about the streets and the drinking places, crossing paths with nocturnal thieves and gangsters. Only the beggars huddled themselves together at dark corners to remind humanity that sadness, loneliness and grief existed in the world. They were trying hard to snatch some winks of sleep to enable them forget the cruelty of the mosquitoes and bugs as well as their hunger.

The Embassy Hotel is one of the tourist-class hotels in the city. At the top there is a bar known as the Roof Garden. If you looked down from it you would see the sprawling city of Dar es Salaam. You would notice the streets and both the human and vehicular traffic as if from an air vessel.

Although you could see all from the Roof Top Garden, the din of the traffic would intermingle with the sounds of music coming from the various quarters below. Enter the inside of the bar and you would find it adorned with flowering plants which almost mask the patrons. You do not need to look too carefully to see this

white man who seems to have been bewitched by two African girls who are keeping him company at his table.

It is the girls who order and the white man pays. The girls giggle at him. They caress his thighs and he laughs. Other tables are occupied by people who hardly demand your attention. At one of the tables you see a man and a woman who strike you as husband and wife; at another you see a man and a woman who strike you as a couple which has struck up a recent friendship. At yet another table you see a small crowd of men talking in undertones, and you are left in little doubt that they are making some secret plans, perhaps to smuggle something or to commit some criminal act.

Hasara is here too, and his eyes are glued to a table occupied by a girl as lonely as he is. Like him she is taking her beer slowly, and like him she is apparently waiting for someone. His eyes are reluctant to leave the girl. He cannot remember when he last saw a girl as beautiful. Of course Dar es Salaam is full of beautiful girls, occasionally extremely pretty ones, but none of them has so struck him. As far as he can remember, the beautiful girls he has seen have had their beauty exaggerated by cosmetics and curious dress fashions, which make them look like daughters of the Devil and not children of Old Adam.

The girl he was looking at possessed a natural beauty. Her hair did not need the use of a dye to make it glossy; its sheen was natural. Her body had no need for lotions to make it brownish and smooth; it had always been like that since birth. Nor did she need to wear a sophisticated dress and fashion it to underline her contours. She wore a cheap, long *kitenge* skirt topped by a low-necked blouse, which left much of her chest and arms bare. One look at the exposed parts and you knew these unpretentious dresses concealed a beauty queen.

With an effort Hasara took his eyes off the girl and turned to look at the waitress who was opening his second bottle and asking him if he wanted something to eat.

"Don't bother about that," he told her, "Later perhaps. I'm waiting for someone."

He looked at his watch. Where was this Hasira? *Must he always keep me waiting for hours whenever we have an appointment? And what is it he plans to tell me that can't be discussed elsewhere except here at the Embassy?*

He could not answer these questions, so he decided to push them out of his mind and return his eyes to the wonderful girl. She was still alone, her head bent over her glass as if scrutinizing its contents. Then she raised her head in such an attractive manner, like one staging some sensuous act for attention. If she had been acting for a screen play, Hasara thought, then the photographer could have had one of his best shots. Then the girl looked in his direction and their eyes met. For a quarter of a second they looked at each other, as if reading each other's thoughts. Then the girl smiled.

Hasara felt as if someone had driven a knife through his chest to his heart. The girl's smile seemed to have wounded him; he could no longer resist her. He bent over his table and poured beer into his glass. He was not aware he was overdoing it until the beer began to spill. He just felt something wet his trousers. Avoiding the girl's eyes that were still keen on him, he signalled to a waitress to wipe the table. Then he collected his senses and went on drinking slowly.

When he lifted his eyes again he found that a man had already joined the girl. He appeared middle-aged and had an athletic body. Even from where he sat Hasara could smell money in the man. His prosperity was loudly proclaimed by the relaxed

expression of his smooth face and his devil-may-care manner. Above all his clothes seemed to have been imported at great cost.

The girl was telling the man something while still wearing that bewitching smile of hers that had wounded Hasara. It pained him to think that the smile was now meant for another man. It was as if his healing wound had been opened afresh. He resumed his drinking after another look at his watch and yet another curse at Hasira for keeping him waiting for so long.

This time he did not look again in the direction of the girl, until he felt a hand tap him on the shoulder. When he raised his eyes they met those of his friend, Hasira. He noticed that although Hasira had now feathered his nest, the pain of the suffering underwent in by-gone days was still evident in his eyes.

"Sorry I'm late again", Hasira apologised, laughing. "Please do understand. I was busy at something." Then he grabbed hold of Hasara's hand and anxiously added: "Get up and let's beat it. We may lose them."

"Where are we going?" Hasara asked, startled.

"Follow me."

They hurried out. Before they left the bar, Hasara looked once again in the direction of the table at which the girl had sat. It was empty now. *So they have left together*, he thought bitterly.

He was honest enough to admit to himself that he had already begun to entertain wild dreams about the girl. He savoured the idea of how blissful it would have been to be accompanied by her on a walk in the streets, a picnic in the park gardens or even a night in bed!

A wild day-time dream indeed. How could he find her again in this huge city with its hundreds of thousands of inhabitants? Moreover, he was convinced she was the type who moved with men of means. But wonders never cease in this city. There was

still a chance of meeting her again and, despite his straightened circumstances, of her falling in love with him and even marrying him. There was no end to wonders in this city!

Look at Hasira, for instance. Not long ago he was worse off than him. Today he was better off, much better. And not only Hasira. There were many workers in Dar es Salaam who seemed outwardly poor, earning the minimum wage, but who owned vehicles that cost millions of shillings to import. It was not uncommon to find a manager who lived in a rented house while his messenger owned four houses. Was there an end to wonders in this city?

"Hurry up, Hasara!" Hasira urged him.

Downstairs they made their way to the exit and Hasara saw a saloon, a Peugeot 505, driving off slowly. Hasira smiled. "So we haven't lost them", he said with a chuckle as he led Hasara to where he had parked his own car. It was a black double-cabin pick-up. They both got in and Hasira started it. They drove off after the Peugeot.

They had not driven far when Hasara spoke: "I think, Hasira, it is high time you told me what's the meaning of all this and what your job is. Of course I thank you for the gift of money and clothes. But I am not a child that I should just follow you blindly. I don't understand why today you tell me to wait for you at the Coffee Bar and tomorrow at the Embassy Hotel, all the time taking your sweet time to turn up. Don't you think I'm entitled to an explanation?"

"What's the hurry for?" Hasira asked him and smiled, "We have the whole night before us. As soon as we have time for leisure I'll certainly explain. It's just a small job and I'm sure you won't fail to do it."

They drove through Maktaba Street and joined UWT Road.

As he drove, Hasira's eyes were fixed on the 505 in front of them. When they stopped at the traffic lights, two other cars came in between them. When the light turned to green the cars turned into Morogoro Road. At Magomeni Mapipa the car in front, driving at a considerably high speed, turned into Morocco Road.

"I see they are going to Kinondoni," Hasira said. Hasara did not reply.

It is night and much of the city is asleep. But here at Tausi it is as if it has just dawned. Everyone here is cheerful, everyone is celebrating the sheer joy of living, everyone is resplendent in his or her best attire. Joy is written on every face and bubbles from every heart. Everyone here seems oblivious of earthly misfortunes. Let hunger and death go hang!

The ability to generate carefree rejoicing is the one thing for which this social hall, known as TAUSI, is reputed. It creates the right atmosphere for celebrating the joy of living.

Take tonight's crowd. There is that young couple, certainly a young man and his girl. That woman over there appears to have thought it cruel for her man to sit on the steel chair and has decided to carry him on her lap like a baby; the man seems contented and smokes endlessly, almost oblivious of the beer that half-fills the glass in his left hand.

Then there is this table surrounded by five people- four men and a woman. The woman seems to have had her fill already. Or maybe she is just the most considerate of them. Look at the way she serves everyone of them in turn. Look at how she caresses the chin of that one while at the same time playing with the beard of the other...the way she tickles yet another, and turns to another to massage his thigh...how she kisses another...and how she turns her attention to yet another! They laugh at her efforts at pleasing

all of them.

Behold yet another wonder. That man was dancing even before the band had stopped fine-tuning. The tempo of his dance is quicker than the rhythm of the music. He is swathed in sweat! He is a wrestler and his muscles seem to have tightened. Drops of blood drip from the head wound he has apparently sustained during one of his wrestling bouts. But he seems not to sense any pain. He flaunts his happiness in his dancing, as if announcing to the rest that he is the happiest of all.

Rukia's eyes had taken in all this from the moment she had entered with her man. They had managed to secure a seat around a table tucked away at a corner, where they sat enjoying their drinks while munching roast chicken. They were on their third round when Rukia started getting excited like the rest. When she first entered the hall she had felt weak and miserable, especially after she and her man were forced to wait for their order to be taken. At that time she had thought the people who were already excited somehow crazy. But now she felt their excitement most natural and that they were the most reasonable people in the world.

"Now, darling", she told her man "How do you like this place? Isn't it a more shell of a place than your dreary Embassy Hotel? What kind of excitement could one possibly get there? What's the fun in seeing few diners seated at tables with solemn faces as if in a church or mosque?"

With her free hand, she felt some sensitive part of the man's body, an action that sent desire surging through him.

He was seized by a fit of coughing, and then he managed to swallow whatever had been in his mouth. "Oh, yes" he agreed, "Wonderful. It's all fun in here but..."

"What's the 'but' for, Peterson?" she protested, "I know you don't like this place, but be patient and you'll like it. The music

hasn't begun in earnest yet. They're still simply warming up to give the people opportunity to arrive and drown their anxieties in beer. Just wait a little and these Mlimani Orchestra boys will show you their fantastic skills. I'm sure you'll like it."

"I don't deny that," Peterson said apologetically, "my fear is that this place can turn into a rough house any moment. Look at that injured man. Getting involved in a brawl and having injuries inflicted on you isn't my idea of having fun. That man might even die or cause another fight which might prove fatal. It's dangerous to have fun at a place like this."

"That maybe so but..."

Rukia examined Peterson carefully. She detected detestation in his eyes and voice. He clearly felt out of place here. He looked like an angel who had mistaken hell for heaven. He was used to cosy quiet places where the volume of music was low and well-dressed people drank quietly and conversed in serious tones about their investment plans. Rukia felt like pitying him. Such a kind-hearted young man not knowing the fun of night spots! Then she remembered she had not set out to pity him. Her soft feelings melted as she remembered her resolve to milk him and take revenge.

She could not forgive him. Hadn't he for three nights taken her to bed and left without paying for the services? It had been very uncivilised of him to leave her high and dry just like that. Now he would pay dearly for it. She would tear him apart like a toy and then piece him together the way she liked!

Now the music began in earnest. The whole hall seemed to be on the floor dancing. The musicians themselves seemed to have worked themselves up for this occasion. The three vocalists were singing while at the same time negotiating attractive dance steps. For some minutes Rukia's eyes were fixed on the vocalists, then they shifted to the dancers on the floor. He saw a smallish young

man negotiating intricate dance steps, throwing his hips and thighs in a sensuous way. Even other dancers were attracted by his beautiful dancing. Some of them were throwing currency notes at him, but he never bothered to pick them up.

Rukia took her eyes off the young man and turned to the seated patrons. The table which had earlier been occupied by the woman who had sat her man on her laps, was now occupied by five men. She recognized one of them. Wasn't he Sam Kitogo, the writer? Yes... it had to be him. That inimitable writer of tales in the papers and author of popular books. And next to him? How could she fail to recognise Hammie Rajab? Although she had never met him he needed no introduction. She had seen his photographs in books and in magazines. Probably they were waiting for Kajubi Mukajanga, another famous man of letters. The two were inseparable. She also recognised Niccoye Mbajo and someone who could have been John Rutayisingwa. Rukia saw a waitress approaching the writers' table. Kitogo must have said something funny which made her smile.

Then Hammie opened his mouth and the girl burst out into loud laughter. The waitress tickled Kitogo's beard. Then she walked away from them to fetch their beers; as she went, she wriggled her bottom at the writers. The writers laughed and slapped one another's palms. Rukia, who had been observing all this from where she sat, laughed too although they did not notice her. She took her eyes off the writers and fixed them on another table.

It was occupied by two young men taking their beers calmly, as if unaware of the excitement around them. The two were looking at her and her partner. She recognized one of them. Wasn't he the same young man she had seen at the Embassy Hotel a short while ago who had fixed her with an angry look? How

come he's here now, she asked herself. When did he arrive? She wondered if he had followed her to this place. She also wondered why he and his companion were looking so determinedly at her.

She tried to fix him with a hostile stare; it was in vain. As had happened at the Embassy, Rukia found herself feeling something tender towards the young man, and smiling. There was something in him she could not resist. She tried to hide her smile in a cough and turned to Peterson.

The beer had already begun to get the better of him. His eyes were now showing signs of life and excitement surging through him. He could no longer hide the fact that he was beginning to like the excitement of the place and it was getting into his blood. Even his hands were now restless. They would wonder over Rukia's body and land at her protruding breasts. The music was also beginning to intoxicate him. His head moved with the beat:

*Another lovely night has set in
Darkness has engulfed the world
But my heart refuses
To give in to its power
Strange joy permeates it.*

Rukia looked at him for a while. Then she seized hold of his hand which had descended to where her thighs were. She took hold of his fingers and began to caress them, deliberately arousing his desire. "Let's get up and dance," she told him. Peterson hesitated, but she took the lead and dragged him onto the floor.

He was not much of a dancer. Ever since his childhood he had found dancing a rather cumbersome affair. Dancing lessons were a nightmare during his secondary school and he skipped them whenever he could. Even in his adulthood, although he possessed expensive music systems and bought numerous recorded cassettes, he never gave attention to dancing.

As he danced he watched the others on the floor and tried to imitate their steps. The music went on:

Yes...strange joy permeates my heart

The look of my girl

Is like moonshine

Her soft skin

Like cold water in a desert...

Peterson looked at Rukia and then at the other dancers. He lifted one leg after the other and tried to wriggle his waist in tune with the beat. He found the whole exercise cumbersome as usual, but he did not despair. He trudged along, trying to adapt his movement to the beat of the music and to imitate Rukia. He was mesmerized by her prowess in dancing. Her beauty and attractive figure blended well with all kind of exhibitions. But it had never caught his fancy that this seemingly young girl could possess such dancing skills. He marveled at the nimbleness of her feet, and the flexibility of her waist. The only other girl he had seen dance so captivatingly was a Zairean beauty whose name he couldn't remember.

Rukia saw the marvel in his eyes. She herself had also something to marvel at. She had not expected this rich, educated and sophisticated man to be so dumb where dancing was concerned. It amused her secretly to see him fumbling like a camel who had been thrown into a pool of water.

Her dragging him to this place and forcing him to dance was all part of a scheme to get even with him. For all his money, snobbery and expensive suit, she intended to bring him to the level of this crowd of merry-makers. Then she would deal him her second blow. For a moment her conscience pricked her and she thought of how unfair she was being to him. She saw how embarrassed he was becoming and feared he might weep any moment. Even the other dancers had begun to look at them with

mocking eyes.

*Yes, a night terrible to feel
But her laughter
Dispels all gloom in me
This loved one of mine.*

She slowed down her pace and began to imitate him so that the difference between them should not be so obvious. At the end of the number, she embraced him and kissed his cheek, whispering into his ear: "Thanks, darling." Hand-in-hand they returned to their seats.

The merry-making of the night continued.

Boozing went on unabated.

The second number played by the band was more captivating. Peterson, now thoroughly intoxicated by both the beer and the music and convinced there had been nothing wrong with his earlier dancing, felt confident enough to drag Rukia onto the floor. But Rukia was hesitant. She had overstretched herself and felt tired. She pleaded that he allow her some rest.

"Excuse me, sir," a voice suddenly startled them. They turned to face a fairly tall young man, slim-fit and endowed with good looks and cheerful eyes. His clothes were new and fashionable and they clung snugly on him. He was the same young man Rukia had seen earlier at the Embassy Hotel. He addressed Peterson.

"May I have the pleasure of dancing with this young lady?" Instead of answering him, Peterson turned to Rukia: "Would you dance with him?"

"I can try, though I am worn out," she said.

Both of them stepped onto the floor. At the beginning they were rather shy of each other. But soon the music drowned their discomfort and their act fell into place like perfect partners. Their steps rhymed and for a while they did it quietly. Soon their dance

developed into a fantastic show for which the other dancers seemed to envy them. They appeared like twins brought into this world to be dance partners.

The next number was a western and its tempo was slow. They danced embracing each other.

Now Rukia seemed to have forgotten all about Peterson who, from where he sat, was eyeing them with anger and jealousy. She also seemed to have forgotten that Peterson had allowed her to dance only one number with the stranger.

It was as if she was oblivious of everything and everyone else. Being with this young man made her feel refreshed, like one feels after a difficult journey in a hot desert. Her head rested on his warm chest. With her eyes closed she began to entertain fantastic dreams that had never entered her head before. She fantasized about Adam and Eve in a garden of love. So enchanting was the dream that even the music receded into the background in one tantalizing moment.

"What's your name, darling?" the young man asked her as his fingers felt the contours of her body.

"Rukia," she whispered in reply.

"Rukia...?"

"Only Rukia," she whispered again, "And you?"

"They call me Hasara"

"Meaning loss. Why?"

"They know."

"Who?"

"It's a long story." He hesitated a little. Then he added: "I don't think I'll be able to live through the next twenty-four hours without seeing you again. When do we meet again?"

"What's the hurry for?"

It was then that they noticed the silence around them. The

music had died with the last number. They also realized with a shock that it was only the two of them who were on the floor, with the exception of a drunk who had been on his feet ever since their entry. Everyone else had taken their seats.

They began to walk towards their table. Concealing his jealousy and anger with a smile, Peterson congratulated them for their "fantastic show". But inside he was a wounded man.

Yes, he had every reason to envy Hasara. He and Rukia made a wonderful pair, like newlyweds enjoying their honeymoon. There was also guilt in their eyes, like a couple aware of the illegitimacy of their marriage.

"Thank you, sir," Hasara told Peterson, handing Rukia back to him. He returned to his own table.

Slowly Peterson emptied his bottle. Upon finishing he noticed that Rukia had also finished hers. He seized hold of her hand and said: "Let's be gone."

"So early?" Rukia protested.

"We've had enough. At least for tonight. There will be other nights in the future. Why should we lose our sleep here?"

Obediently Rukia rose to her feet and followed him. As she went she tried to resist the temptation to bid Hasara farewell. But she did not succeed. Their eyes met and both of them exchanged secret farewell smiles.

"I think the time has come," Hasara told Hasira in anger, "You must tell me the secret you have been wishing to tell me all this time. You have instructed me to watch the stupid man and his girl and I've done so; you've suggested I ask the girl for a dance and I've done so. I think I have marked their faces like the back of my hand and I think I have impressed the girl. But what's the meaning of it all?"

Hasira swallowed his beer audibly. "Not so fast, Hasara," he told him. "No so fast. This is top secret." Lowering his voice even further, he said: "What you do with the girl is your own affair. Whether you'd like to fry her first or eat her raw is for you to decide. From what I've seen of her as you dance, she looked more than ready to do your bidding. Gee! I'd be damned if you don't possess some charm!" He paused. "Our target is the man with her." He paused again and went on in undertones: "We want him to die. We do not care in what manner, whether by a bullet through his chest, a knife stab from the back or a poison in his drink; the important thing is that he dies. And that within this week."

Hasara looked at him as though seeing him for the first time that evening.

"So he's to die," he breathed, "What has his death got to do with me?"

"We're sending you to kill him."

"What?" Hasara hollered, stunned. "Look here, Hasira. I do enjoy jokes, but not of that kind. And I'm not stomaching anything like it."

Hasira looked furtively around, checking if anybody had overheard what Hasara was saying so carelessly. But nobody seemed to have noticed or heard his friend's loud protest. He turned to Hasara: "This is the kind of job which will give you sufficient money to liberate you from your poverty. It is a favour I have given you, seeing you're my childhood friend and in need. The whole affair need not be gruesome. Have a dose of poison dropped into his glass of beer and your job is over. Next you will be enjoying life with all the money you're going to earn. Get it from me there are hundreds of suckers who would have fallen for the job at quarter what you're being offered. What do you say?"

The car pulled up in front of the Indiana Hotel. All the way to this place Rukia's coquettish fingers had been running all over Peterson's body. Peterson had found himself compelled to drive with one arm while the other reciprocated Rukia's caresses. Thus they arrived at the hotel twenty minutes later than the journey deserved.

The girl at the reception desk had been dozing but on their arrival woke with a start. She stood up and reached for the key to the couple's room, which had been hanging on the rack with others. Having received the key, Peterson and Rukia walked up to the elevator hand-in-hand

On the fifth floor they left the elevator and made for their room. The room was reassuring and comfortable just as it had been the other night. Peterson drew Rukia close to him and together they made towards the bed. Then Rukia broke loose and, to his surprise, knelt in the middle of the room. She cupped his feet in both hands and said in a pleading voice: "Listen, darling. I want this to be a night with a difference. A night which we shall never be able to forget. Do you understand?"

"I don't, yet..."

"It's like this. I'm your maid tonight. For ten years now I haven't had a man. My mother is away. But I your maid want to make you... or let's say tempt you, into...but you wouldn't agree. Do you understand?"

Peterson had yet to understand. But he didn't need to. Rukia's hands were already busy undoing the strings of his shoes.

After the shoes the hands began to work on the socks. Her fingers began to tickle his toes in a way that aroused his desire. Then he felt her tongue licking the toes while her hands worked on the buttons of his trousers. One by one she took off his clothes.

Her tongue travelled on to his navel. Her fondling sent desire burning through his entire body.

He was now panting with longing. Stark naked he lay on his back on the bed. He struggled to free himself from the young girl's coquettish attentions, but she pushed him back whispering: "Papa, keep still...Let me, your maid, administer to your needs...please papa...mother is not here...please, please..." He could no longer stand it. He writhed like a fish being fried alive. He emitted a groan of pain and satisfaction. He was now weeping: "Rukia, darling...what can I give you, Rukia...ah..."

Her response was to double her efforts at caressing which sent his body burning with wild desire. It was a thrill he had never sensed before, a pain he had never endured...something like a dream...that now coursed through his body. It broke down his endurance and, for the first time in his life, tears of desire rolled down his face!

Seeing a man's tears gave Rukia immense satisfaction. She valued a man's suffering on her behalf more than she did such gifts as a car or a house. It imbued her with a sense of heroism.

For a while she looked at him. Then she began to wipe his tears using her firm copper-colored breast. She whispered to him, like a woman soothing her child: "Take it easy, child...take it easy...". In her heart she was however laughing at him.

Outside, Rukia's eyes wandered here and there until she saw the man walking down the street leading to the lake-shore. She hurried after him. As if he sensed that he was being followed, the man left the street and slid into an obscure path. Rukia doubled her pace. She found him standing by the path, looking at her as she approached.

"What's wrong with you, little girl?" he asked in a voice mixed

with anger and surprise.

Rukia did not reply. Instead she ran her hand around his waist and leaned her head against his chest. In a weak voice, she started weeping silently. Her tears were warm and added to the warmth of his body, driving away his anger and replacing it with sympathy. The sympathy soon developed into desire; she could feel it surge through his body. These made her embrace him all the more tightly and caress his waist more tenderly. His hands flew down to her buttocks and cupped above them.

"What do you want, daughter?" he asked in a voice no more harmless. In a tearful voice, while torturing him all the more with her fondling, she whispered: "Allow me to pay for your kindness." She lowered her head even further and began to undo the buttons of his trousers. She let out an erotic groan. The man coughed dryly and held her head into his hands. He tilted it a bit and said, "Let's go."

They left the obscure path and came out into the open. He took long strides as if ashamed of being seen with such a little girl.

When they arrived at one of the guesthouses which abound in the town of Mwanza, the man told her to wait while he asked if there was a vacant room. He found one. It was cheap and poorly furnished and would not have cost a lodger a great deal, but Rukia loved it. For the first time she was savouring the idea of sleeping in a bed with a mattress and in a room lit by electricity! The strange stench that filled the room did not bother her. She had been used to a stench like that at home.

The man left her alone and went out. When he came back he had a parcel containing a chicken's leg and roast potatoes.

"Eat," he invited Rukia.

"Not now," she replied. "Later."

"Now!" the man said authoritatively.

Shaken a bit Rukia sat at the only table in the room and began to eat. It was then she realized how hungry she was. She ate voraciously, munching every bone. Then she washed down everything with a glass of water.

"Thank you," she said and went to the bed.

But the man was already snoring. Rukia smiled inwardly. Without disturbing him she peeled off his clothes, down to the last one. She began to caress him with her lips and he woke up, aroused. He was surprised to find himself naked with a naked girl, young enough to be his own granddaughter. But he could do nothing to resist the young girl's advances. She welcomed him into her.

It was not as easy as she had thought. The man, now wild with desire, was totally oblivious of her tender age. Rukia tried to brave his sexual attack but she was soon overpowered by the pain. She began to weep aloud. Her whimpering simply encouraged the man to work himself up over her.

"I won't do it again," she vowed amid her tears when it was over, "God be my witness, I will never do it again!"

In front of the Indiana Hotel, on the other side of the street, there is a filling station belonging to BP Tanzania. Behind the station there is one of those parks in Dar-es-salaam which, judging from their look of negligence, have either been abandoned or overlooked by the City Council. This park was large enough to accomodate a twenty-storied building or a multi-disciplinary children's playground. Now it lay desolate like some unclaimed property. Heaps of refuse stood like small hills all over the place. Only street-children visited it in search of crumbs or some valuables like spoons which could fetch them some money. Occassionally old beggars would camp here at night and make a fire to keep themselves warm.

Tonight Hasara was stationed at this park. He stood leaning against a wall beside the old beggars who slept around their fire. His eyes were alert, studying the main entrance to the Indiana Hotel across the street. He was expecting Peterson to come out of the building leaving Rukia behind. Then he would go over and take his place. The filth of the place, the stench oozing from the refuse, the mosquito stings and the probability of a bite from a scorpion or even a snake occasionally made him question the necessity of being at such a place in the dead of the night.

He recalled the events of the evening. Hasira had taken him from the Embassy Hotel to the Tausi Social Hall and pointed out a man and his girl, seated at a table, and told him: "Mark their faces. They are the people we're hunting for." He had wondered why Hasira bothered about a couple enjoying their evening but had not asked. From where they had sat, only the table occupied by Peterson and Rukia was visible to them. He did not understand why Hasira was telling him to mark the faces of the occupants of this particular table. What was more, Hasara had already recognized Rukia. He had seen her earlier at the Embassy and was already nursing dreams of one day sleeping with her. Nevertheless, he had obeyed Hasira's instructions and observed the couple carefully. It was then that his eyes had met those of Rukia. Hasara's heart had missed a beat on seeing the bewitching smile. In a voice that he hardly recognised as his own, Hasara had told Hasira:

"I won't forget their faces. Never!" Then he had added: "I've fulfilled my part of the bargain. I have marked their faces. Now tell me what it means."

"That's to come later," Hasira had replied. "I want you to dance with that girl."

He now remembered that it was after the dance that Hasira had

made him that strange proposition of murdering Peterson. Up to now he had not been told why the man deserved to die.

He wondered how Hasira had come to imagine that he, Hasara, could be a murderer. Could it be that he had misinterpreted that incident where he had given a fellow street-child a fatal blow to the chest long ago, during their childhood? Did that incident make him believe that he, Hasara, had killed in cold blood?

After Hasira had suggested that he murder Peterson, Hasara had thought of these things and felt a surge of anger sweep through him, making him wish he could tear Hasira to pieces. He had exercised control over himself with a superhuman effort and simply asked in his amazement: "What...?"

And yet Hasira would not go into the details. When Peterson and Rukia had left Tausi, Hasira had suggested to him that they follow the couple in their car.

Hasira had then abandoned him in this place. He had instructed him to observe the entrance to the Indiana Hotel in the belief that Peterson would come out soon, leaving Rukia behind. Then Hasara would go into the hotel and take Peterson's place beside Rukia. In this way, according to Hasira's strange plan, the opportunity to murder Peterson would present itself.

That was why he was here, growing nervous by the minute. What made his waiting more tolerable was the fact that he genuinely desired the girl and was not just obeying Hasira's instructions.

Patience invites blessing, so the saying goes. But to Hasara that night that adage seemed so empty, devoid of any meaning. His patience was now proving to be a torture. Ants had without his knowledge climbed onto his body and began to bite him. He writhed in his anger, almost giving out a cry. Then he began to kill the ants between his fingers. But they had invaded his clothes

too, and the only way to keep their bites at bay was to undress. He shifted from where he stood undressed and painfully managed to rid his clothes of the pests. There were no more ants at his new position, but it was so near the refuse that the stench choked him. He felt a strong desire to walk away altogether.

But he found himself staying on in the hope that any time Peterson would come out of the hotel. He waited. No Peterson. Only some other people going in and walking out.

One of the beggars woke up and fixed him with a strange stare, apparently wondering why this well-to-do young man could be at their lair at this time of the night. He however asked no questions. Instead he remade his 'bed' consisting of rags and newspaper pieces and resumed his sleep.

What was the meaning of life if one had to live like these beggars, Hasara asked himself? Wasn't death a better alternative? What was the need of fearing death when you didn't even know whether there was a better life after death? Perhaps these questions never bothered the beggars! They might even be enjoying their way of living!

He remembered his own childhood, although his adulthood so far was no better. It was not until he discovered that there could be a better life that such questions had begun to bother him.

He tried to push the thoughts out of his mind and grapple with other questions he had not been able to find answers to. Why did Hasira want Peterson murdered? Why did he pick on him to do the job? Was it because, as he had claimed, he loved him? What kind of love was that which made you drive your loved one to smear his hands with blood?

Even these thoughts he tried to push out of his mind, on the grounds that the time to ask the questions had yet to arrive. He would have to wait until he had learnt as much as he could about

Peterson from his girl before raising them.

He looked at his watch again and blinked. Was it playing tricks on his imagination? It couldn't possibly be as late as quarter past four in the morning! Almost dawn and he was still out in the open! He turned his eyes nervously to the east. Yes, there were the signs of dawn. He wondered whether it would not be better for him to start moving away. He looked again across the street at the main entrance to the hotel. Then his eyes wandered to the old beggar who was now sleeping soundly.

For many years he had been no better than this old nonentity covered in rags. He spent his nights at places like this. He remembered how he had had to put up with odours like these, how hunger would gnaw at him and how he had learnt to put up with it all hoping for a lucky break. Ever since that day when some lucky-born children had scorned his fighting with other scavengers for a shilling something had been pulling at his heart, something oscillating between anger and shame. He felt life had been unfair to him. How humiliating it had been for him to live off crumbs and endanger his own life! How humiliating it had been to be so scantily dressed and sleep out in the open!

Since then he had begun to meditate on his life, and his blind cheerfulness had gone out of him. Anger ruled his heart. He was full of indignation at the entire mankind. He had started to hate himself for the kind of life he was leading and which he had thus far accepted unquestioningly. His mates did not have the time to look at him or listen to his woes. Thus he had kept his thoughts to himself, hating the world, hating his life.

To his playmates he was just one of them, sharing in their joys and troubles. But their solidarity did not last long. Now and then some members of the gang would go away and new ones would

join. These new members were admitted into the brotherhood without any questions.

Knowing each other's name was all the members of their gang cared for. Then came the day Hasara would never forget. For the first time in their lives they had a celebration. They had more than ten roast chicken all of which had died from a strange disease and had been thrown away by their owner. The gang had collected the thrown-away chicken and roasted them over a fire. But just before they began their feast, six policemen had surrounded them and began to beat them. The children had panicked. For a while Hasara had stood stunned, not coming into grips with what was taking place. He had looked at the policemen chasing members of his gang and bashing them.

For a strange reason they had forgotten about him altogether. He had therefore watched his mates being marched away, in pairs, their hands joined by tying their own shirts around them. Shaken by the experience he had retired to their other camp, an unfinished building which had stood there for many years. He liked the place because it gave him protection during the night, but despised it for lacking in refuse pits where food could be thrown by those who had more than enough.

He had entered one of the rooms of the unfinished building but found nobody. He had left it and entered another. There he had found Hasira stretched over a log which he called his bed. Hasira had jumped to his feet in joy.

"I thought you had been arrested," he had told his friend.

"Who are those people who descended on us as we were about to feast?"

"They were from the police."

"Police? Are they bad people?"

Hasira had laughed. "No. They are the enemies of bad people."

They arrest bad people."

"Why then did they arrest some of us?"

Hasira had laughed again, but this time his laughter had that usual bitter quality about it. "In their opinion we are bad. We don't deserve to live. You did well to escape." He had paused and then added: "They would have thrown us into jail."

Hasara had said nothing in reply. Inwardly he was grappling with the many questions which were rearing their heads in his mind. Yet he had never found answers to those questions. He had been astonished even more when Hasira said: "We shall go home today. We cannot sleep here tonight. They may come and arrest us."

"Home?" Hasara had wondered. "Where's home?"

"My home."

"Your home? So you have a home?"

"Yes" the answer had come, but there had been no enthusiasm in Hasira's voice as he said that. Later they had left. Just their starved bodies. They had nobody to bid farewell to and no luggage to take with them.

At that time the town of Dodoma had seemed so large to Hasara. The journey to Hasira's home seemed so long that he had thought they would never arrive. But they had walked on, leaving the town behind them, until they came to a village whose huts were uniform.

The huts had flat roofs made of clay. They called them 'tembe'. Some of these had stood in silence while others had had lowered voices coming out of them. Used to the lights of the city, the thick darkness which covered the village as the night set in had made him feel like one who had come to gehanum instead of a home.

The hut belonging to Hasira's parents was surrounded by an uncared-for maize garden. It was dark both on the outside and to the inside.

The hut was dominated by a strange silence. Hasira had knocked at the thatched door.

"Who's there?" a furtive voice had asked from the inside.

"It's me," Hasira had replied.

"Who are you?"

Hasara had looked on in amazement. What did these people fear? What valuable possessions could such a poor hut contain to make the inmates fearful of nightly visits? Or did they fear for their souls? Who would need them?

Eventually the door had been thrown open. A trembling voice, apparently belonging to an old man, had invited them in. It had taken some time before an oil lamp was found and lit.

"Tomasi!" the old woman had cried when the weak light had made the visitors visible. "So you have come back home, my son!" She had risen to embrace Hasira. "You're welcome."

Then the four things that had been lying still in a corner of the hut looking like logs came to life. They were actually human beings wearing hides and pieces of calico. They rushed to Hasira in their joy and embraced him.

"Brother Tomasi is back...is back...welcome," the children had cried. Their cries had aroused the neighbours and soon the hut was full of human beings. Hasira and Hasara had found themselves in the midst of this rejoicing crowd.

"What a nice shirt you're wearing," one child had cried. "What gift have you brought me? I need a shirt like this one!"

Hasara had looked at the shirt which was winning the praise. It was thread-bare and full of holes, one of the rags they had picked out of refuse piles in the city. He had not seen why it was winning praise but had soon realized that to a poor boy wearing a piece of old calico Hasira's shirt was superior.

Hasara had stolen a look at the faces around the hut. All were

in a pathetic state. He thought they could have looked healthier, but lack of food had made them thin and weak. They could have been more cheerful, but their joy was skin-deep. The whole scene had seemed to Hasara a perfect expression of poverty. Certainly you could not compare them with the well-to-do people in the town who had looks that spoke of good food and wore nice clothes.

He had stolen a look at his friend, Hasira. His head had been bent as if he did not want people to see his shame.

The weak light of the oil lamp had then begun to waver.

"No more oil in the lamp," the old woman had said regretfully.

The neighbours had begun to disperse.

"I don't know what I'll give you to eat, my children," the old woman had moaned as soon as the neighbors had left. "We ourselves have had nothing to eat this evening. And your father, as you know him..." A man had been heard singing merrily outside the hut. His songs were pregnant with meaning, but his voice was doubtlessly beer-soaked. *responsibility*

"That's your father, Tomasi," his old mother had announced. The children, both boys and girls, had hurried to their corner.

It had been obvious they feared their father.

"Open the door!" he had barked. "Woman, open the door!"

The door was opened and he had entered as vicious as ever. He had begun to hurl insults at the woman.

"Just who the hell do you think you are? You drag yourself opening it and..." His eyes had then fallen on Hasira and his friend.

"Who are these?" he had growled.

"Tomasi and his friend."

"Who? Tomasi? When did he return?" He had fixed Hasira with a strange look.

Then he had burst into a drunken laughter. "So you're back, aren't you? After all these years! What have you brought back

with you?"

Hasira had looked at his father in amazement.

"Are you deaf?" the old man had barked at him. "Look at other boys your age. They go away to far away towns and come back with cars and money to build permanent houses. But you...what have you brought back with you?"

Hasira had held his peace and his father had raved on: "This house is already full. The people in here are already too many for us to feed and you come back with an extra stomach and empty hands. What do you think you two are going to eat? Where do you think you'll sleep?" He had then laughed sarcastically: "There are boys your age who returned from those far away places and transformed their homes. But you return to plunge us deeper into poverty with an extra mouth to feed." *Lonely*

Hasira could not stand it any longer. He had risen to his feet and, grabbing hold of Hasara's hand, helped him to his feet. "Let's be gone," he had said, leading him out of the hut. At the door he had turned and said coolly to his father: "Boys of my age who have fathers return home and are warmly welcomed. I regret being a son of a devil like you! Not even my dead body will ever be carried back into this house!" His voice had carried pain and grief. Tears had escaped his eyes as he dragged Hasara along and said: "Let's be gone."

"Where are we going?"

"Never mind that. Just let's go."

When he opened his eyes, Peterson found himself in the warm embrace of the young naked girl and felt good, like a child enjoying the warmth of its mother. But he panicked. His mind tried to figure out where he was. His eyes wandered to the window. Strong sunlight, signifying that the morning was far gone, flooded the

room. It made everything in the room glitter with a kind of strange romance.

He had, for the first time, slept away from his home! How would his wife react? His panic was however short-lived; he did not feel like regretting the act. The night had been one of its kind, a night any man would never let slip out of his memory. He was proud of having experienced it. Only one thing bothered him, haunted him like a nightmare. Yes, that sound which had come out of him against his will. Had it been his own voice? How did it happen that he, a man, had capitulated by weeping? Or had it been a cry of gratification? As far as he could remember he was not a man who wept easily. He laughed inwardly and lowered his eyes to look at the girl who slept naked next to him.

Taking care not to arouse her, he extricated himself from her embrace and went out of bed. Swaying a little, he tip-toed to the bathroom where he showered in cold water. The water somehow revived him.

He remembered something else. During the few snatches of sleep he had managed to get during the night, he had had a wonderful dream. The only thing that he now remembered about the dream was that he had been weeping. It had been genuine weeping, brought about by bereavement and not by gratification. Why had such a dream to visit him during such a night of romance?

Suddenly the door to the bathroom was pushed open and Rukia walked in. She was still naked. Her hair was disheveled and hung over her unwashed face. A sweet smile hovered around her sensuous lips making her admirable even in that unkept state. Had she been in the streets she would still have attracted men even in that state. It did not surprise him to feel a wave of desire steal its way back into him.

"Did you sleep well, darling?" she greeted him.

"Better than I'd expected," he replied. "Only I feared you might kill me..." He laughed.

And indeed I intend to kill you, Rukia thought. Aloud she said: "It's I who feared you might kill me. I didn't expect..." She took a cake of soap and began to wash him.

"I don't want you to trouble yourself," he protested, but she ignored him. Her expert hand ran all over his body, covering the ears, arm-pits, belly, thighs... Peterson could hardly tolerate it. He began to writhe with desire. "Take it easy, darling," she said in a seductive tone, her fingers doing more than just scrubbing his body. Sometimes she licked him with her tongue.

"Let's do it again," he whispered.

"No..."

"Please..."

"I don't want to quench all your desire... Let's reserve it for your wife. She might go to the police."

Reluctantly he gave up. It was real torture to let himself be towelled dry and be helped into his clothes by this girl. On their parting, she planted a sensuous kiss on him and tickled him, sending a wild wave of desire surging through him.

"What kind of reward should I bring you, Rukia?" he asked her.

"I don't think I want any other thing than seeing you again," she cooed in reply.

He reluctantly left her. She had requested that she be left behind to catch a few winks because it was still early. She watched from the window and waved at him as he entered his car, snugly parked to the left, reversed and drove out into the dawn.

Mama Sonny, his wife, welcomed him with an expressionless face, hiding whatever thoughts she had been harbouring. Apart from saying "Good morning" to him, she let him be. But as soon

as she had served his breakfast, she retired to the kitchen where she locked herself up. Peterson took another bath, changed his clothes, nibbled at the breakfast and left.

This time he used a BMW since the houseboy had not finished washing the Pajero. The Benz, which had been lately monopolised by his wife, did not seem good enough for him.

From his home at Mikocheni the road was jammed with cars as far as he could see, which made him decide to change his normal route. He drove in the opposite direction to the Gogo Hotel at the junction of Bagamoyo and Morocco roads. He went into the restaurant and ordered soft drinks and roast meat. Having eaten his fill, he began to read the day's paper. But it offered him no excitement. He left it on the table and went out. The jam had now eased and he drove without difficulty until he reached his office situated along the Makunganya Street in the city centre.

"Welcome sir," said his secretary, "Is your family well?"

"Fine and healthy, Grace. Thank you." he replied as he entered his office.

He sat at his oval-shaped table, made himself comfortable on the swivel chair and drew in a deep breath. His eyes roved over the room. Then he looked at the 'IN' tray and, finding there was no letter there requiring immediate action, picked yet another newspaper that was dropped at his desk by a vendor every morning. There was nothing exciting in it either. He was still idly flipping through it when Grace sauntered in.

"Sir, there are four calls which require your attention."

"From where?"

"There is one from that man at the Ministry. He has just hung up but said you can call him. Another came from that United States firm which wants you to be its local agent. They said they'll call you again soon. The income tax people rang again and I had to

tell them you've travelled. The last came from that Lulu Company man who also said he'll ring you up later."

This last bit of information aroused his interest. He had been negotiating a deal with Lulu Enterprises which if clinched would realize for him the biggest profit since he had founded his company, Continental Distribution Ltd. He could not explain why he had so far dilly-dallied about the deal. In spite of them calling him almost daily, he was yet to give a firm reply. Then he remembered suddenly he had promised to give them the final answer today. He also remembered having commissioned his lawyer to investigate the firm to determine if they were genuine enough to do business with.

"Did Rashid call?" he asked Grace, who was still standing near the door.

"No. But he has rung from somewhere. He wanted to talk to you and said he'll call you up later."

"If he calls put him through, please."

"All right, boss," Grace replied and prepared to leave. Her gait was the same; she swaggered as if oblivious of his presence, an act he knew was calculated to tempt him.

He laughed inwardly at the knowledge. This was the fifth year Grace had been in his employment, but she had never despaired of trying to seduce him with her eyes and gait. What was wrong with women of today, he asked himself? To them every man was a husband. Why couldn't Grace, for instance, be satisfied with her high-paying job and the fringe benefits that went with it? What did she lack? To complicate matters, didn't she have a husband? What then did she want from him?

There was a time Peterson had nearly fallen into her trap. There were only the two of them in the office. He had, in a careless moment, cupped his hand over her bottom and kissed her. Perhaps taking this as a deliberate come on she had tried to be at her

seductive best. She would sit carelessly, her short dress notwithstanding, and deliberately stayed behind when the day was over. But he had resisted the temptation just in time. He respected her efficiency. She was "the office wife" who knew everything about him short of his bed-time secrets. He well knew that turning her into his lover would be like marrying her. He was prepared to sack her rather than let her consume him with passion.

...I'm your maid...For ten years I haven't slept with a man...

Rukia's words echoed again in his mind. His heart let as he remembered the events that had followed those words. He would never forget that night. *Rukia!* What a girl she was! What was the secret of her power? Who taught her so well that she was now more of an expert than her teachers?

There was one thing Peterson did not mind: the fact that every act of Rukia proved what a big prostitute she was. It made him love her all the more. He argued that the years he had lived in this world as well as his classroom and outside education had taught him that all women were prostitutes, and that the most beautiful was the biggest of all.

What made the difference, according to him, was whether the prostitution was with many men or tied a woman to one man. He reasoned that God had intended a woman to act in bed like a prostitute to her man. It was misdirected modesty and hypocrisy that had driven some women to treat sex as an unnecessary ritual to be merely gone through.

But Rukia was different. She behaved during day-time just as she would behave at night. She was free to think and act her natural self. She had the charms to make a man feel free and enjoy his freedom.

He felt a strong desire to be with her again. He would not be averse to having her always at his side. His desire for her turned

into jealousy as the thought crossed his mind that there might have been other men getting what he had got last night. The very idea of this possibility spoilt his happiness. He bent his head but he could not think straight. He would need a short break. He rose to his feet and started walking out.

"I'll be back shortly," he told Grace as he passed the reception.

He walked to the car park, started his car and drove off. He stopped at a reputed and trusted Indian gold-smith's shop in the city centre.

"Patel," he told the squint-eyed goldsmith, "I want a clean piece of job and I want it fast."

"No problem," the Indian replied in broken Kiswahili. "Everything here 'express'. What you want?"

Peterson looked at the show case where gold earrings, necklaces and other articles of adornment were displayed. "I want earrings like these ones," he said pointing, "a ring like that one, two necklaces like those, noselets like those and twelve armlets like those..."

"Very well, sir, very well," said the Indian. There was a slight tremor in his voice.

"What will the total cost be?" Peterson asked.

"For a stranger," the Indian said as if Peterson was not a stranger to him, "that would have cost six hundred thousand shillings but for you it'll be five hundred and fifty, O.K?"

"Would you like your payment in cash or should I make out a cheque for you?"

"I'd prefer cash." The Indian was now visibly trembling.

"You'll get your money soon," said Peterson after looking at his watch. "I need these things in a hurry. When can I expect them?"

"In three days..."

"No," Peterson said firmly. "Today. I want them ready this evening, alright?"

The feeling of loneliness after learning he had lost his mother so early in life had some unpleasant effect on young Peterson's mind. He talked less and played less with his mates. Most of his time was spent reading.

The strange change in his son worried Mr. Peter. He tried to draw him out to bring him back joys of childhood, but the child would not cheer up. He thought a school far from home would make him forget, and at his tender age Peterson was sent to a boarding school abroad.

The boy seemed to have liked the opportunity to travel abroad while so young. He began his education in Britain where he received his basic and university education. He took his second degree in the United States. If it had been left to his will he would not have come back home to even spend his holidays. But his father had seen to it that he always returned home.

At the beginning of his holiday each year, he would receive air tickets to travel first-class to Dar es Salaam. On two occasions he had thrown away the tickets and opted to do temporary jobs throughout the holidays. It worked on the first occasion, but on the second he was interrupted by a telegram from one of his father's workers informing him that the old man had been flown to Paris suffering from sudden heart attack. Peterson had to fly to Paris to see his sick father. His condition was bad, but after seeing his son the old man's health improved fast. He said in many words that the young man was the main cause of his illness.

Peterson abandoned his temporary employment abroad and returned home with his father. The old man's illness aroused pity and tenderness in him. He followed him wherever he went and

listened attentively to whatever he said. This made the old man happier and soon he was bubbling with health.

After his father's recovery Peterson could not resist the temptation to talk to him about his late mother. But whenever he broached the subject, he felt that he was opening an old wound in his father's heart. So he thought it better to abandon the idea altogether. It would not have been wise for him to torture his father thus - the only parent he had - for the sake of a dead mother.

But that did not quench his desire to know something about her. For a strange reason he felt there was something more than merely death between his father and his mother. Why was it that his father took all the care in the world not to mention her in his talks, even by mistake? Hadn't he heard him talk about other dead persons?

So, instead of confronting his father directly with the question, he began gathering what he could from the neighbours and old servants of his father.

"Died?" one of the servants he had talked to seemed surprised, "When did her death occur?"

Scared of being told something he did not expect and feeling a bit ashamed, Peterson abruptly left the discussion. But from that day he could not even sleep. Now that the doubts he had had been rekindled, he would not rest until he had found out the truth.

Several days later he found an opportunity to talk to Kautipe, their cook and oldest servant. He was a kind-hearted old man, always reserved and humble even at his age. It was Kautipe, among all the servants, that Peterson had felt close to since his childhood.

"Look here, Mzee Kautipe," he started in a faltering voice when they were alone. "Please do not hide anything from me. You must know a great deal about the secrets of this house. Tell me all you know about my late mother I pray."

Kautipe had clearly not expected the question. It left him dumb-founded, like one who had been struck by lightning. When he had recovered from his shock, his eyes glistened in tears which later rolled down his cheeks. Finally he asked in a trembling, fearful voice: "What do you want to know about your mother, Peterson?"

"Everything. In the first place, I'd like to know whether or not it's true that she's dead."

Kautipe had mustered sufficient calmness. He dried his eyes with a handkerchief that was spotless as his white uniform: "She may be dead now" he started, "or may be still alive. Nobody would know. Not even your father knows what has happened to her."

"I don't understand," Peterson protested. Anger was already surging through him. "I don't know what you people take me for. Do you mean...?"

"I don't think it'll be to your interest to know anything about your mother," Kautipe said, avoiding Peterson's angry eyes. "It won't benefit you. She was not a mother anyone would be proud of."

Chapter 3

GOLD!

To Rukia it was like a dream. For the hundredth time she fingered the gifts and felt them in her hand. She smelt and kissed them. Now she hugged them close to her chest, her eyes closed. *Gold!* She had never possessed so many golden articles. She had expected some kind of gift from the man but she never thought he would be this generous. She remembered her indignation at him for bedding her without anything to show for it. She shouldn't have worried. What God has willed for you He has willed. She remembered her life of near destitution that had forced her into flesh-peddling at an age most girls are still tagging at their others's dresses. And now that she was holding *gold* in her hands!

Yes, she had vowed to punish this man, vowed to use on him the only whip she knew how to wield so well - her body! She had done it yesterday, but she had not expected the effectiveness of this first blow. What would the second one produce?

Her aim had been to make him suffer in bed, to wreck his house and bore a big hole in his pocket. She had expected him either to drop helpless at her feet, tantalized beyond words by her unique love-making, or to see his marriage disintegrating in disgrace. She had felt sure either of the two things would take place. But she had never expected to make him her slave in this manner. Judging from this initial impulse he would give her the world were it in his power!

Only one night and he had covered her with gold. What would

the second bring? Some strange tenderness she had never felt towards any man tugged at her heart. Was this tenderness what people called love? Did this demonstration of generosity on his part mean she was to change her initial plans to make him suffer? Was that possible? Perhaps. Didn't they say love consisted in giving? She had offered what she had, he had taken it and been happy, and now he had reciprocated. Did that mean the seeds of love were already germinating in their hearts?

The thought of this made her laugh inwardly. The idea of her loving him was the silliest that had ever crossed her mind. Love? Was she capable of love?

She cast another glance at the golden gifts. Deliberately she rose to her feet and tried on the necklace, the armlets and earrings. She dragged herself to the mirror and admired herself. The image might as well have been that of the richest emperess in the world, or of the daughter of the world's richest man. Or some queen. And without expecting it she saw this most adorned of all beauties begin to shed tears. The tears were soon followed by intense sobbing. She had to muster all her strength to prevent herself from collapsing into a heap. She threw herself face downwards onto the bed, still weeping.

When she had received those gifts last night she had been more astonished than pleased. All the same, she had managed to pretend she had been pleased. She planted many kisses on Peterson and kissed the gifts themselves so many times one would have thought she had gone crazy. Peterson had been greatly gratified by her appreciation. But Rukia knew that she had been behaving hypocritically. The gifts had not touched her heart - not as yet. Instead she had felt like the proverbial hungry hyena to whom a piece of meat had been thrown. But this morning, when she had seen the twenty thousand shillings that had been left on the table

for her, and carefully examined the gifts, she had begun to feel differently.

Now, in her tenderness for him, she longed for his presence. She longed to have him around so that she could thank him. Not because of the treasures, but rather because he had been the first person to want her, love her and value her as a human being. He was unlike the others who went only for her beauty, took what she had to offer, paid for it and then thought nothing of her, as if she were some ass! True for three night he had used her for free. True too she had hated him for treating her like a common woman or a wife. But she had been all wrong about him. The gifts and his generosity had demonstrated that he had been in love with her from the very first day.

Love? she thought again. She laughed again inwardly and rose from the bed. She went to take another bath and then changed into a new dress. Her choice for the morning was a light white dress which sat tight on the upper parts of her body and broadened out at her legs. Elephant-ear bottom as she called it. She had designed it herself. Then she slipped on all her golden things and topped it all with cosmetics and a sophisticated hair-do. Then she again looked herself over in the mirror.

She now looked like a real queen.

Another tear drop formed in her eye and rolled down her cheek. Her, once going round in rags, sparking with radiance of a queen! She returned to the bed where she sat, her face supported in her soft hands. She felt her head growing heavy. It was as if she could not stand the weight of the unanswered questions fleeting across her mind.

Peterson, darling...you've got Rukia trapped! This is what they call love!

She felt as if a voice was whispering this to her. She shook her

head. No, it was not convincing! Her to have loved!

She was slightly taken aback by this turn in her thoughts. That she would even think of love towards anyone was strange in her world. But she knew the name of Peterson rang persistently in her mind and that she would never take her mind off the gifts he had made her. This had led to her softening towards him and, again strange, she thinking of him all the time. What made her particularly marvel were her tears. She could not tell whether she had shed them for Peterson's sake or her own.

She also could not tell why she was feeling guilty over the insincere thanks she had expressed to Peterson. It was as if she had simply wounded him instead of really thanking him.

Her prowess at love-making had left Peterson helpless, making him weep and laugh throughout the night as if he had gone mad. And when he had finally slept and woken up late, at about ten o'clock, he had still been helpless with desire. But she had turned him away; he had left for work still 'hungry'. She had tantalized him with caresses for a goodbye, an act calculated to make him remember her throughout the day and ensure he returned. It had not surprised her to see Peterson enjoy his suffering and openly crave for more!

She was looking forward to his return. This time she would show him genuine gratitude. She would make love decently and passionately and give him the worth of his generosity. Yes, she would demonstrate her love for him, but also remind him not to abandon his wife. She faced the brute fact that she was a prostitute, a street girl, one of the hundreds that roamed the streets of the city. She would not like to break men's marriages and then sit back to sneer at them. No! She would not wish this misfortune on the family of a man she had come to respect like Peterson. The thought of punishing him, of destroying his marriage and taking a

sweet revenge on him had already melted away from her like ice, making her feel ashamed of the evil intentions she had once harboured on him.

But why shame? Why the compassion? *Because of love, Rukia!* the voice whispered into her ear again. She again found herself laughing inwardly. How could she tell love while she had never loved? It baffled her why she was feeling this tenderness for Peterson, why she now wished him well instead of carrying out her initial plans of exploiting and leaving him penniless, like "a ship worthy of unloading" as street girls in Dar es Salaam called men who were overly generous.

She glanced at her watch. It was already quarter past eleven! This startled her. She could not believe she had remained that long in the room without going out to have her breakfast. It surprised her still to realize that she was not even hungry. All the time she had been preoccupied with only one thought: Peterson. What was it if not love? She laughed inwardly at the question.

She thought of ringing up for room service; she did not feel inclined to descend to the restaurant. But just as she was about to lift the receiver the telephone rang. She let it ring on for a while. Then she lifted the receiver and mentioned her room number.

"You have a visitor at the reception," the voice at the other end informed her.

"Allow him along," she replied and replaced the receiver.

Two minutes later she heard a knock on the door as it was pushed open. A handsome face of a young man with radiant eyes peered into the room. The owner of that face was a tall young man Rukia seemed to remember. The visitor took two strides and stood in the middle of the room transfixing her with a charming smile.

Rukia felt as if her heart had flown away from her and perched

somewhere else. Her whole body and heart were paralysed. Even her tongue seemed to have stuck in her mouth.

They looked at each other silently for a while. Then in a deliberate whisper she stammered. "Ha-sa-ra!"

"I'm happy you even remember my name," the young man said.

"No. I could not forget it."

Yes, she could not have forgotten him. Whenever she set eyes on him a strange feeling would partake her. It had begun the night they had danced together. She had been seized by a feeling she had never known before, a feeling that would lie dormant in her only to come to the fore whenever she set her eyes on him.

"I cannot forget you," the words escaped her lips again. Then she realised she was repeating what she had said. A sense of shame momentarily swept through her and made her feel like the visitor in her own room.

In calculated short strides Hasara covered the distance separating them. Tenderly he lifted Rukia's hand from her lap, gripping it in both of his. "I know you're beautiful," he whispered, "But its only now that I realize you're more beautiful than I had imagined." She looked up at these words. She detected the sincerity in his tone, unlike the deceptive phrases men flaunt before women. "You're good Rukia...Make me feel welcome, please!"

"You're very welcome," she whispered the reply, her eyes dropping to the floor. Then she looked up and surveyed him from toe to head as he stood in an impressive pose. She then shifted a bit and made room for him on the bed. "Sit down," she said beckoning him.

Like an obedient child he sat next to her on the bed. She pressed her soft body against his.

"I didn't expect to see you again," she managed to say.

"I don't know how I would have managed without seeing you again," he said, "I would have been dead already."

"Don't pull my leg."

"I've never done that, Rukia."

"What are you talking about, Hasara?" she asked looking up at him. "You're still so young!" she exclaimed then asked, "How old are you?"

"I don't know."

"What!"

"I don't know, honestly."

They looked at each other. She believed him.

"How about telling me all about yourself, Rukia?" he asked, "I'd love to hear everything about you."

She looked sharply at him. Some of her happiness had evaporated in a flash of self-condemnation. Did she have a past worth talking about? Was it worth telling this young man whom she felt she could not lie to all those gory details? What was there to be proud of about her past- a past marred by shame and immorality?

The pain that had been inflicted on her in the guest house room in Mwanza so many years back came flooding back. After the terror she had thought she was through with men. The night had opened a new chapter in her life, a chapter she had been eagerly waiting for, but she hadn't liked.

Although she never met the man again, she could never forget the experience. He had been the first man she had spent a night with and he had set her on course for her present life. The three hundred shillings he had given her had been sufficient to buy a new dress that now made her attractive enough to win other men. Looking well-dressed and beautiful, it had not been difficult

getting her second man. He had winked at her from the other side of the street and when Rukia responded with a smile, he had crossed over to her.

"Let's go somewhere," the man had told her.

"Where?" she had asked.

"It doesn't matter where," the man had said. "I have some money. Two hundred shillings. Isn't that enough?"

She had pretended not to understand, but the man was experienced and had a way with young girls like her. He knew when a girl wanted a man and when she needed him badly. Girls like these were his favourite. They tasted like liver, he would say. Their inexperience tickled him; it made him patronize them in love-making, unlike the seasoned prostitutes who would insist on taking charge. As a bonus, they were cheap. Give them two hundred shillings and they would grab at it as if it were a hundred thousand.

With those experienced prostitutes things would be different; you would be forced to buy beers, hire taxis and foot the bills for every other thing, and yet they would demand the right compensation for their services.

"I have a room at Nyamanoro," the man had said.

"But I can't go with you. Two hundred shillings is not enough."

"Three hundred?"

"No. My man leaves me five hundred each morning."

This had surprised the man. Who might have taught this mere child the art of bargaining so hard? He looked at her. Then he realized she was older than she looked which suggested more experience than he had given her credit for. The face was however striking; she was really beautiful. Just what had driven such a young beauty to roam the streets? For the first time he had felt inclined to pity girls of her sort. But he wouldn't miss the opportunity to enjoy himself. "Let's go then."

"Do we go at my price?"

"Let's go."

Their destination was a room that seemed to have been prepared for the purpose which had brought them here. It was at the back of a main building that seemed uninhabited. There was no other furniture in the room apart from the bed. The man bent and from under the bed produced a crate half-full of bottles of beer. He removed two for Rukia. She forced herself to taste it. It was her first time and it tasted bitter in her mouth, but she would not let it out that she had never tasted beer. To survive in this cruel world she had had to acquire the cunning of an adult early in life. In the profession she had chosen beer-taking was part of the game, and the earlier she got acquainted with it, the better.

To prove she was not a stranger to these things, she emptied the second bottle faster than her host. Her host, seeing that, encouraged her to drink more.

She emptied the third bottle in a wink.

She proceeded to down her fourth.

She did not remember taking the fifth. All she recalled was that when she woke up it was already morning - the following day! It was nine o'clock and she was naked on top of the bed. When she tried to get up pain stabbed at her head, back and feet. With a great effort she lifted her head and looked herself over. Her body was smeared with filth. Her eyes surveyed the room. There was neither her host nor any other soul in the room. She tried to sit up. Her whole body was numbed by a strange fatigue. It needed real effort to get herself up.

For the first time tears of regret streamed down her face, and she let them run their course.

Mama Sonny had been anticipating the moment she would demand

a divorce from her errant husband. She had resolved never to show any sign of suffering, any sign of capitulation, as she battled him. Peterson was not the only man in the world. It would not have done to waste her tears on him. And she would not give him the satisfaction of seeing her weep on his behalf.

But the intimate embrace from him made her forget her resolve and instead she found herself letting her head fall on his chest. Without her will and knowledge she began to sob. She lost the strength to restrain the sobs and the tears wet her husband's chest.

During that brief moment of their embrace, Mama Sonny's mind had retreated from her earlier objective and considered the possibility of making up. Fear descended on her heart. She had to brace herself for the battle of winning a husband, a battle she had last fought while she was a girl. On the battlefield, there were many women arrayed for the battle, ready to win their trophies - the men - at any price. But where were the men who were prepared for fidelity in marriage? Many of them were con-artists and hypocrites. Most wanted to marry for only a night and had lost faith in women. Suppose she, Mama Sonny, got the divorce certificate? With two children behind her, how did she expect to attract the attention of a man, any man?

Watch your step, Mama Sonny, she warned herself. Do not miss giving birth to your baby by flaunting your pregnancy. A husband is always like a wayward child. Discipline him.

"Baba Sonny," she whispered amid her tears.

"Yes?"

"Why do you do this to me? How have I offended you?"

The question jolted him out of a day-dream and for the first time he remembered he was in the presence of his wife. He saw how she leaned her head against his chest and noted the big difference between her manner of embracing and that of Rukia.

Rukia knew just where to wind her arms and how to do it. Not like this amateur who simply rested her head on his chest and irritated instead of thrilling him. *How I wish you'd offended me...* he thought. He even wanted to say it aloud, but decorum restrained him. He began to feel sorry for her. He affected a gentle tone.

"But what have I done to you, Mama Sonny?" he asked, feigning ignorance.

"You don't know?"

Carefully he sat her on the bed, doing everything possible to deny her opportunity to drive him into the defensive. He did not want to say anything in his defence since that would have meant denouncing Rukia and perhaps inadvertently mentioning her name.

"Rest awhile, Mama Sonny," he told her.

Common sense had taught her that if the medicine for fire was fire, then for a woman it was a woman. She resolved she would be more of a woman than the one who possibly led her husband astray. She pulled him towards the bed and helped him out of his shoes and clothes. She kissed him. She did to him what she had never done before, used every possible trick to arouse him. Nothing worked. Rukia's love-making had drained all desire out of him.

For two hours Mama Sonny tried all the tricks in the book, but her efforts at exciting him came to nothing. He feigned tiredness and even affected a snore. At the end he got up and, after planting an artificial kiss on her cheek, proceeded to the bathroom. Back in the room he quickly changed clothes and left. Behind him, Mama Sonny lay prostrate on the bed, sobbing her soul out.

He arrived at the office at quarter past eleven. Grace welcomed him without a word, restraining herself from asking what made him report late these days.

"There have been many calls today," she said after greeting him, "Those Lulu Enterprises people rang almost three times. They

Midway

left a message that you call them as soon as you arrive." Lulu Enterprises, he thought. If it was an experienced business firm as its director had claimed, why this show of anxiety? And what had they to worry about while their wares sold like hot cakes? Two twenty-five ton containers of badly needed medicines! That was more than gold. What was more, the medicines were as good as being in their hands for they were only awaiting clearance at the port.

The precious goods had come into Peterson's possession by sheer luck, when one of the directors of Lulu Enterprises came to him and offered to sell him the whole consignment for only twenty million shillings. Their explanation was that they were not licensed to sell medicines. Peterson had sought to know where they had got the medicines. They had said their contact abroad had battered the medicine for gemstones which they had exported to him. Peterson wanted to know more. Why hadn't the medicines been cleared at the port? The director had explained that Lulu Enterprises had no storage facilities.

That such vast wealth should come into his possession had seemed to Peterson one of those lucky breaks that had followed him since his birth. He had really been born lucky. The son of a rich man, an expensive education, a highly-paid job later relinquished in favour of a highly-rewarding business, a beautiful wife and handsome children - all these were blessings he had taken as a matter of course.

This deal with Lulu Enterprises was an opportunity he had felt he should not let slip. He had shown samples of the drugs to the relevant authorities at the Ministry of Health and to drug sellers in the city. A quick calculation had intimated that the sales would bring him something close to two hundred and twenty million shillings. All that remained for him to do was to write out a cheque

Rashid - lawyer

to Lulu Enterprises and they would hand over the necessary documents for clearing his cargo at the port.

Yet, for reasons he could not explain, even the enormity of the profit would not drive him to make out the cheque immediately. Instead he had commissioned his lawyer to investigate the firm to satisfy himself that it was genuine enough.

"Oh, the Lulu Enterprises people!" he panted and then hesitated, "Now, Grace, has Rashid turned up?"

"Yes. He has called in twice asking for you."

"If he calls in again, show him in immediately."

In his own office, he fiddled with that morning's papers without much interest.

X He was suddenly jolted by a knock on the door and he sat up, tidying himself up to welcome the caller.

Rashid did not look exactly like a lawyer; he appeared too young and too sly for it. Although his clothes this morning were decent, they were too casual to impress Peterson whenever he came into his office. The trousers were a shade too tight, topped by a bit-too-wide shirt. He sported a handsome face and a head covered with a mass of thick hair. However his manner of dressing would change whenever he was required to appear in court of law. He would then look the real professional.

Rashid possessed unusual gifts that far exceeded the law degree he had obtained from the University of Dar es Salaam three years back. Peterson had to be thankful to him since Rashid would sometimes act both as a lawyer and a detective. In this way he had helped the company a great deal.

Peterson responded coolly to his greetings that morning and signaled to him to sit.

Rashid did not need to sit. He knew why Peterson wanted him and he put on the table a thick file, smiling a bit as he did so.

"You'll find everything in there, Mzee," he said. "It was very smart of you to seek my advice before entering into a contract with them."

Peterson lifted the file that was inscribed LULU ENTERPRISES on top. He then opened it and began to read. The more he read, the more his eyes seemed to pop out in surprise. Sometimes he would take his eyes off the file and give Rashid a quizzical look. At last he could not restrain himself.

"What's this?" he asked, "Is it true they have nothing in their bank account? You want to tell me that they instead have a debit of nine hundred thousand shillings and that it's two years since they deposited anything?"

Rashid merely laughed.

"And what's this? Is all this true, Rashid, that all the three directors are actually one and the same person who changes his signatures! And now what's this? You want to tell me they are operating from no known premises?"

He let the file drop on the table and fixed Rashid with a baffled look. "What does it mean, Rashid?"

"You still don't understand, Mzee?" Rashid asked.

"You mean to say that this Lulu Enterprises... is... all..."

"Fraud," Rashid interjected. "They are *tapelis*."

"Tapelis? You mean..."

"They are conmen. They want to swindle you out of a huge sum of money. The whole business is a hoax and you're lucky to have found this out early. Had you paid them the twenty million shillings you would not have seen them or their trace again until perhaps in the next life."

Peterson remained stunned.

"I have even gone to the port," Rashid went on, "I talked extensively to officials there. There is nothing there for Messrs Lulu Enterprises."

Taphi
"But I saw the containers with my own eyes," Peterson protested, "I saw all the labels. They even had all the necessary documents!"

"What do you think they're called *taphis* for? Isn't it for their ability to fake things like documents? They had laid down fool-proof plans to trap you."

Peterson burst into sudden laughter. He had been swindled on many occasions before, but this time it would have been a catastrophe! He looked more closely at Rashid and felt new respect for him. *I've no brother*, he thought, *why don't I make him my brother instead of my employee?* Aloud he said: "You've done a splendid job, Rashid. You need to be congratulated. On your way out, ask Grace to hand me the cheque book."

Rashid knew the meeting between him and the boss was over. But there was one thing he wanted more than the promised cheque.

"Do you want them to go unpunished, Mzee?" he asked Peterson, "Why don't you sue them? We have enough evidence. You can still write out the cheque for them and we shall trap them as they go to cash it."

"No, Peterson said" "We don't have the time to waste giving evidence in cases that take on wards of two years to conclude. It's enough to know what they've been up to and beat them at their own game. Today I'll inform them that the deal is off. I think that'll be enough." He waved Rashid bye and turned his attention to some other business.

After a few minutes, however, his attention wandered. Like on so many occasions in the recent past, his thoughts wandered to Rukia. He longed to get up and go straight to where she was. But a sense of guilt restrained him; he had not been in the office for more than half an hour. He took up a newspaper again and tried to read. He still found it boring. He dropped it on the table and pulled

the Lulu file towards him. He would not bring himself round to opening it. He rose up and went to reduce the degree of warmth in the room although he knew Grace had set the air-conditioner at the right temperature. After a while he rose to his feet again and went to readjust the temperature.

One of his direct-line telephones buzzed. He eyed it momentarily with mounting excitement. Then he picked the receiver

"Yeees...!"

A sweet-female voice almost whispered from the other end of the line: "Is that Mr Peterson's office?"

"Certainly. Who are you?"

"This is Lulu Enterprises. May I talk to Mr. Peterson himself?"

"Speaking. Who are you?"

"Mr. Peterson? Hold on a moment for Mr. Hasira."

He waited for the man, rather angrily.

After insulting the impostor in a civilized manner and after comforting him and asking him to suggest another deal that would have a measure of honesty, he hung up while the man at the other end tried to talk.

He sat back on his chair satisfied he had hit the cheat smack in the face. Then he remembered something important. He took up the newspaper again and turned to the classified advertisements page. He found what he wanted - houses on sale. The offer which attracted him most was that of a three-bedroom self-contained bungalow complete with modern lavatories and bathrooms for every room, a swimming pool, a garage and a fence. As per the advertisement the house was fully furnished. It was situated in a low density area - Oysterbay - very near to the beach. It was exactly what Peterson wanted. He lifted the receiver and dialed the seller's number.

"I've seen your advert. Is the house still available?"

"Oh, yes," the voice at the other end of the line said, "Potential buyers have made enquiries, but they ask to be given time; some want one week and others longer. But we want someone who'll buy it immediately."

"I will"

"Fine. Come and see me."

"How much is it going for?"

"Those before you had offered up to twenty-three million shillings but we can talk."

"Then I'll come. Do you accept cheques?"

"Of course."

After replacing the receiver the thought crossed his mind that he should invite Rukia to go with him to survey the house, but on second thoughts he dismissed the idea. He wanted it to be a surprise gift. He would go to her in the evening with the keys.

"Grace," he called. "Give me the cheque book again, please."

"She had not been a mother to be proud of," Kautipe the servant had said of his mother. These words rang day and night in Peterson's mind like a bon-fire. What kind of person had she been then? A drunkard? A whore? A lunatic? All put together? Were these sufficient reasons for denying him the privilege of knowing his own mother? How many mothers were all these things and more, but were able finally to live happily with their children? He found it very hard to put off the fire of puzzlement that raged in his mind. It was a puzzle he knew he would not unravel on his own. He needed to talk to people. But he refrained from doing even that for fear he would discover something worse than he had expected. He remembered how Kautipe had panicked and wept when he had confronted him with the question. He chose to suffer

silently.

At that time he had thought his degrees were sufficient to see him through life. He had retired prematurely from the public service and taken a job as a director of the local branch of a foreign company. The job was good and the salary attractive. But he did not stay long in it. Only six months later he had quit and founded his own firm with his father's help. This was after he had firmly rejected his father's pleas that he form a partnership with him in his own business.

It had not taken Peterson long to realize that his education was not very useful in business. He had even begun to think that the time he had spent abroad studying had been wasted. He had come to realize that what mattered in the country was who you knew. It was a matter of 'technical know who' and not 'technical know how'. Knowing people who mattered and having them know you was more important than the paper qualifications.

At first it had surprised him to see people who did not know the fundamentals of construction, for example, running construction firms. That did not prevent them from winning rewarding tenders. At the same time experts in the field missed tenders and were forced to close down business and seek re-employment.

It did not take him long either to know what was important. He did not find it difficult to adapt himself to the situation. He came out of his ivory towers and began to live among the people. Being a highly- educated son of a well- known personality, it did not take him long to cultivate the contacts he needed.

Soon he began to reap the fruits of his socializing with all and sundry. Although his company specialized in export, it was not strange to find a branch of it doing road repair or constructing a new road, or selling medicines to factory dispensaries, or supplying food items to an army brigade, or selling arms to a certain ministry.

or even acting as an agent for a foreign firm. There was no end to what his firm could do. Whatever it had undertaken it did it with unparalleled efficiency.

Soon he had to learn to survive something else: politics. He had avoided politics from his school days. He had feared that politics, like religion, was something that wasted one's time grappling with metaphysical issues. He did not want to load his mind with such things and he wanted his freedom. For this reason he had avoided taking up political posts, knowing so well that people with his kind of education were badly needed to achieve ideological objectives. This had been so since the country signed the Arusha Declaration, the blueprint for the building of a socialist and self-reliant community. He made himself inaccessible to those who wanted to drag him into politics, like a tortoise hiding in its shell. He had a philosophy that although politicians ruled the country it was the rich who really ran it. He thought the platform oratory of the politicians was all hypocrisy.

He had seen some politicians preach equality during the day and pursue their acquisitive ends during the night. Some of them even came to him and apologized for what they had said about capitalism and riches. If the country's wealth was what made the country what it was, then it was those in whose hands that wealth was concentrated who ran the country.

He did not think the country's policies better than those of the countries he had been to. What kind of policies were these that closed people's eyes, made them clap with joy at some lofty ideal while the people who preached the ideal knew just what they wanted and got it? But perhaps it was better that way. It would have been disastrous if the masses knew the truth. So long as the masses remained ignorant, the clever few lived in a sort of paradise. The right climate had been created to benefit the privileged few.

And those few, like himself, could walk right into a state-owned bank and borrow huge sums of money without abiding with the conditions that discouraged the masses themselves from wanting to borrow. He could walk into the offices of a Government department or ministry and walk out with a million + shillings worth of tender for some insignificant service or job. He could buy produce from the cooperative unions and export them at a handsome profit and then pay the cooperative with local currency. With money he could do anything in this country. If this was not what running a country meant, then what did? What other blessing did one need from God?

Happiness abounded in his heart and life seemed as sweet as honey. *Smile*

Yet this happiness would sometimes be spoilt by that fire of puzzlement which burned in his mind concerning his mother. It nagged at his thoughts with a ruthlessness that made him desperate.

Chapter 4

Holden told her to Rukia
"TREAD on the clutch!"

"Where is it?"

"This thing here. Apply some strength."

"Alright."

"Now fire the engine." The engine of the Benz gave a beautiful sound and the car shook.

"Now, tread on the gas pedal and leave the clutch." Rukia obeyed. The car lurched forward and the engine went dead. She trembled. Peterson laughed.

"Listen," Peterson instructed her, "You need to release the clutch slowly while you press hard on the gas pedal. And I forgot to tell you something important. As a matter of fact, you start a car with gear number one. Then you can change when it is already in motion. You had set it in motion with number three. Let's start all over again."

Rukia trod on the clutch again, this time sure of herself. "Good," Peterson encouraged her. "Now change the gear to number one."

She did as she was told. Without waiting to be further instructed, she eased pressure on the clutch and pressed the gas pedal. The car sprang forward all of a sudden. She tried to steer it without much success. They swayed and almost plunged into a canal. She trod on the brake pedal with all her strength. The engine went dead. Trembling, she panted: "We'll die!"

Peterson only laughed and told her, "You're not doing badly. Your mistake was to tread on the gas pedal so hard. You should

have gone about it in a relaxed manner. The engine has gone dead because you braked without treading on the clutch. Had you done so and then stepped on the brake pedal it would have stopped without going dead.

"All driving a car needs is the adroitness of the hands and feet. Once you have mastered what your feet and hands should do at each critical moment, you can drive a car even in your sleep. Now let's call it a day for tonight. I know tomorrow you'll approach your lessons with more confidence and the day after you'll be in a position to offer me a lift to town."

"No," protested Rukia, "Let me try it again. I don't want to wait until the day after tomorrow before I can offer you a lift to town. I want to do it tomorrow. Now we'll start all over again. Don't tell me anything. I want to see if I remember what I've learnt so far."

Without waiting for a word from Peterson she trod on the clutch. She started the engine and pressed the gas pedal with her foot. This time the car obeyed her and took off at a reasonable speed. She was even able to steer it with considerable ease. After she had driven for some five hundred metres she trod on both the clutch and the brake pedal. The car stopped. Then she released the brakes and pressed on the gas pedal and the car took off again. She increased the speed a bit and then decreased it.

Peterson marveled at her progress. "It took my wife two weeks to reach this stage," he said.

"Perhaps she was not in a hurry. I'm in a hurry. I want to be seen in town driving like other women drivers."

"What's the hurry for?"

Yes, what was the hurry for? She asked herself the same question. Why was she in a hurry? Was it because she still thought she was dreaming? Was it because she wanted to taste everything,

do everything and enjoy everything before the dream came to an end? Could this possibly be a dream? What dream could be this long, this sweet?

The idea that all this could be a dream had implanted itself in her mind since that morning when she had received those gifts of golden earrings, necklaces and bracelets. Ever since that time she had not lacked in money. And just before she had time to adjust to the reality of her changed state, she had been brought the keys to a modern bungalow, to be all hers, with the title deed to confirm ownership!

This had plunged her further into dream-land. She could not bring herself round to believing these things were actually happening to her. She had thought she was still dreaming when a truck had come to collect her and her belongings so that she could be installed in her new home. The house itself had been something out of the same dream. It had room for four families. Rooms as large as oceans! Beds so wide and furniture that had cost a fortune! Lavatories for every room! Warm and cold baths at will! A swimming pool! A garden! A telephone! Air conditioners!

"This... mine?" she had asked in wonder.

"Yes, yours!" Peterson had reassured her. She had felt as if she was going to weep for joy. Or laugh. But she did neither. Instead she had stood dumb-founded in the middle of one of the rooms they were inspecting.

Peterson had seen the unbelief in her eyes and had been pleased. He had even thought there was more he could do to baffle this girl even further. Before he could think of what next, he had ran his arms around her waist and kissed her. But Rukia had not been in a condition to reciprocate. Nor had she demonstrated the possession of any strength when he hoisted her up and carried her into the bedroom and lay her on the wide bed. And she had had no strength

to resist when her clothes were being peeled off her one after the other. She was not even aware of what he was doing to her. She had remained dazed.

Peterson understood how she must have been feeling. To give her time to recollect herself he had left her saying he was going to contact a firm which had promised to provide her with a watchman and a servant that very evening.

When he came back Rukia had still been in the same state, eyes fixed on the ceiling and mouth agape. He had greeted her with a kiss she did not find the strength to reciprocate. "I've got a maid," he had told her, "One pretty girl who can cook and wash and do the laundry. If you need another help, I'll see to it that you get her. I don't want you to get any problem, darling."

Silence.

"I couldn't get a watchman for tonight," he had gone on, "I want a very faithful man. You'll have very valuable possessions in future. You'll soon have a video and a TV installed in here."

Silence.

"Do you know how to drive, Rukia?"

She had still not answered.

"If you can't drive, I'll start giving you lessons at once," he had added, "Transport in this city is such a big problem. You don't go easily where you want without a car of your own. Once you've mastered the skills I'll make you a present of a car."

To Rukia this had merely been the continuation of the dream. She could not participate in the dialogue. She had gone on lying on her back, still dazed. Peterson had begun to get worried.

"Rukia... Rukia... what's come over you?"

She had simply stared at him, as if seeing him not; as if hearing him not...

"Do you understand what I'm telling you, Rukia?" All of a

sudden she had risen to her feet and stood bolt upright. She had turned to Peterson and fixed him with a hostile look. It had scared him as nothing ever did before.

Then in a reproachful tone, quite unlike the affectionate one he was used to hearing from her, she had told him: "Listen, sport... I can't stand living in this dream any longer... I want my real world... I want my world of poverty... This dream is not good for me... It has no truth in it... Let me be, please... Let me be..."

"Dream?" Peterson had asked, surprised. "Which dream, Rukia? Everything you see is really yours. And I'm not joking..."

She had struck him. He had not expected the blow and it had landed squarely on his cheek. He had seen the second coming, but he had failed to dodge it because it was too late. But he had managed to parry the third by grabbing hold of her hand.

"What's come over you, darling?" He had shouted at her, tightening his grip on her hand. "What has come over you?" She had not replied. Instead she had weakened in his grip and dropped face-down on the floor. And then she had broken into a sob. And Peterson, having complete control of the situation and understanding her perfectly, had let her sob on.

For about ten minutes she had continued to sob. When she could cry no more, he had hoisted her into his arms and taken her to the bed once again. He had wiped her tears and reassured her by fondling her. This time sparks of life had begun to show in her. It had now been Peterson's turn to be dazed. He had immediately been whisked from this world to one of romance and bliss. He could not tell whether Rukia had now decided to give him pleasure or to torture him. All he had known was that he was going through suffering, the suffering of pleasure, or rather pleasure disguised as suffering. His bliss had been disguised as pain. And she had now been determined to do anything... anything that would

transport him from the world of the commonplace to one of intense pleasure... and suffering. She had known what she was doing... and done it better than whoever had taught her. After a while it was Peterson who had wept, wept aloud. But it was weeping born of pleasure.

Daylight had ended without their knowledge and they did not know it either when night came and ran its course. Neither of them had cared about eating. Neither of them had been aware when the maid had reported for duty and knocked for long without any response.

They had woken up on the following day. They had dragged themselves into the bathroom next to the bedroom and showered. The cold water had revived them.

Hunger had begun to gnaw at their stomachs and they had satisfied it with boiled eggs, hot milk, roast meat and some snacks, washing them down with cold fruit juice.

After that they had gone back to bed.

Peterson had gone to the office that day, but had instead rang up to give Grace some instructions. That night had also found him away from home. He had not even bothered to ring his wife.

This was the third day and Rukia was here, learning to drive! She had been promised that if she could master driving today, tomorrow she would have her own car. If this was not a dream, what was it? And who could blame her for being in a hurry to learn everything before the dream was cut short and she was rudely brought back to the world of reality? That world full of cares and suffering! The world full of filth and revolt! The world she would have given everything to forget! The world which, in the face of this dream, was like another dream although it had left an everlasting stamp in her life?

The night her second man had used and defiled her at Nyamanoro had given her a valuable lesson. Life was a battle and in order to go through it you had to be on your guard, fully armed, ready for attack or defense. She had learnt that her worst enemies were not the wild beasts in the wilds or ghosts from the graves. The real enemies were fellow human beings who surrounded her daily. She had come to realize that she had to acquire all the weapons others before her had used in this battle. Heroism in bed seemed to her the strongest of all. But it was only one among others; she needed these others as well. One of them was the ability to lie - and lie convincingly. A woman had to know how to lie to men and master the art of deception. Another was wine. A woman had to learn how to make a man silly with a drink and to keep her wits about her while he lost all his senses.

All these Rukia was able to learn and practice. She had mastered an exceptional art of love-making which drove men in her bed mad and raised doubts whether they had ever slept with a woman who knew her job so well. And she was such a good liar she would make any man believe that he was the first to sleep with her, the first to go into her and deprive her of her virginity. She also had the ability to explain away her infidelity. If her lover caught her red-handed with a man, she would soon make him believe that the man had actually been her relative or some desperate fool pestering her while "she did not fancy him." And during all this time she had turned into an expert drinker. She took alcohol as if it were soda and bhang as if it were tobacco. But ~~Drug & tobacco~~ she took care not to be enslaved by both. She remained in control of her wits.

If a man did not get drunk easily enough she would keep vigil at his side and ensure that he had spent all his money on her. And

if a man was knocked off by a few drinks, she would steal from him and make good her escape.

Her youth, beauty and skill in delivery made her famous in the town of Mwanza, more famous than the more experienced prostitutes of the town most of whom were ageing. All male prostitutes in the town tailed her. Some fought for her, while others would in frustration beat her. It was all part and parcel of the profession.

But she had soon tired of Mwanza. One truck driver took her to Arusha at the price of sleeping with him for two nights at Singida and Babati. In Arusha the male population there lost their heads at her sight. A man of seemingly inexhaustible funds and who seemed not to know what to do with the money put her up at the New Arusha Hotel. She lived there for two months, eating, drinking and sleeping. And when she had grown tired of the man, she escaped to Moshi where another Chagga man gave her everything she wanted. But he was an extremely jealous man; they parted company after only two days for the flimsy reason Rukia had dared respond to the smile of a young man they met in a disco at Moshi Hotel. She went back to Arusha.

X It did not take her long to get yet another man. To get him she had had to visit tourist class hotels such as the Mount Meru, New Arusha, Safari, Seventy Seven and even the smaller ones like the Chinese Hotel. Whenever she visited these places it did not take long before beer, roast meat and other forms of snacks piled on her table. Then the man who ordered these would sit beside and start entreating her. It looked as if men's chief weapon was money. Rukia had learnt to identify the men who really had money and those who pretended to have it. She was always very careful in her choice.

Arusha was full of beautiful girls, but Rukia had shone among

them like a queen. Apart from her beauty, her youthfulness and skill in bed made men scramble for her. Almost every man wanted her and whoever had her would not want to lose her. But she was averse to being dominated by one man, at least not cheaply. Her interest was to deceive and milk money from them. She would run away from those whose funds had dried and seek shelter under those who had them.

"I don't know what you desire in this life, Rukia," one man once told her. "Your beauty could win you a famous husband who would give you a car and a house so that all your life you'd wallow in luxury and comfort. I don't understand you at all."

Even Rukia did not seem to understand herself or what she wanted. She did not know why she went looking for men with money and when they spoilt her with their generosity she ran away from them. She was like a seductress whose mission was to lead men to misfortune and then leave them high and dry. What exactly did she want? Happiness? Pleasure?

✱ How many men had promised her these and more? But what happiness could she derive out of her present life, when men made her suffer, especially when they realized she did not intend to have a regular lover? There had been those who had tried to fool her by consuming her with affection. There had been one frustrated man, who having seen that his male organ did not satisfy her lust, had thrust a bottle of a cold drink into her and put her out of action for four days. Yet another had made her drunk, given her more money than she had asked for, then brought in his dog to sleep with her! And as if that was not enough, another had lured her into his lair and exposed her to five other men, all who got what they wanted out of her. hostility

Oh, yes, she did experience pleasure in this business but there was no pleasure which did not have its price. She considered

these sufferings as inevitable professional hazards. She did not allow herself to be broken-hearted or despair.

The town of Arusha also bored her soon. Then she hooked one pilot with an air corporation who flew from time to time to Nairobi in neighboring Kenya. She went there with him on one of his trips and he booked her into one of the big hotels in the Kenyan city. When she had had enough of him, she escaped into the streets of the city to earn Kenyan money her own way.

Just as with Tanzanians, Kenyan men also took her for nothing more than a pretty animal created for their gratification. It was as if a cold war was going on in the world between levy men and prostitutes. It was as if every man was seeking to make her suffer. And she felt it was cruel of men to laud a woman who submitted to their authority and agreed to suffer at their hands.

Yes, all the men she had met so far had taken her to be an object for their pleasure; they took what they wanted from her and paid for it. Except Peterson. He was the only man she had known who enjoyed suffering at her hands. Only he had appreciated her human worth and shown her genuine love. Behold how hard he tries to show his appreciation of her worth. Behold how he values and feels satisfied with her so much that he forgets his wife and family. Gold! House! Car! And these things had become hers after being with him for such a short time. Yes, who would blame her if she was in a hurry?

She turned and looked into Peterson's eyes. She withdrew her hand from the steering wheel and wound it around his neck. She drew him close to her.

"Yes, I'm in a hurry, darling," she whispered into his ear. "I want to know how to drive, fast." She lowered her voice further and snuggled closer to him. She longed to kiss him, but strength

failed her. Instead she felt bitterness welling up in her again, bitterness which made her burst into a silent cry. Tears escaped her eyes and slid down her cheeks onto Peterson's chest. Peterson gazed at her in amazement.

"What makes you weep, Rukia?" he asked in a kind voice.

"I don't know," she sobbed.

"You don't know!" he sounded surprised.

"I don't ... leave me alone for a while, please." She spoke slowly without attempting to push away Peterson's arm, which was still wound around her, his fingers caressing her.

If in the past she had wept in self-pity, now she wept for Peterson's sake. On many occasions she had called him 'darling'. But she knew she had not nursed any genuine affection for him. Apart from pitying him and paying him for his generosity and benefaction, she felt nothing else towards him. For all he had done for her, his wonderful gifts and all, she could not bring herself round to loving him. For the first time in her life, she felt like one committing a sin by being unfair. Why was she incapable of reciprocating his love although he had been so good to her, so kind? Why?

Why, in spite of being so close to him, did her mind keep straying to Hasara, a mere youth who had nothing to offer and would not manage to support her in life?

Hasara felt as if his head was in turmoil. He thought Hasira was confusing him further by his incomprehensible explanations. He had tried to pay attention to everything Hasira was saying without understanding even a single word.

It was after he had examined him closely that he discovered something. Although Hasira showed all signs of exterior calmness, and although he spoke with a smile, his mind was in a turmoil

too. Or else how could Hasara explain his taking the trouble to visit him at his humble dwelling at Magomeni Mikumi, Manda Street, when he should have stayed at a modern hotel? How could he explain Hasira's condescending to sit on the worn - out couch which harbored cockroaches that would sooner crawl up the body of a well dressed man like him? And more than that, how could he explain Hasira's long silence, as if he did not know what he wanted to say while, only two days ago he would talk as if he ruled the entire African continent?

Another clear sign of Hasira's confusion manifested itself when he asked without lifting his head: "Why did you fail to murder him?"

"Murder who?"

"Peterson."

It was only now that Hasara remembered that he had been charged with the responsibility of killing Peterson, a responsibility he never let bother him. Contrary to what people thought, he was not a murderer. Even had he been, he would not have killed a man without first knowing the motive behind it. The only reason he had kept vigil at the hotel was to get an opportunity to see that girl again.

Rukia! Ever since he had seen, for the first time at Tausi, and the short opportunity he had had dancing with her, he had been filled with joy as if he had had a meeting with an angel. After that magic evening he felt as if an angel had departed from him, plunging him in the uncertain darkness of life.

On being reminded again of this responsibility, he began to see its importance. He began to curse himself for not having carried it out. Rukia had disappeared from the hotel and Hasara was sure this Peterson was responsible for her disappearance. Hadn't that hotel steward leaked it to him that he had seen Rukia's belongings.

including boxes containing her clothes, being packed into a car which later drove away? Hasira was sure Peterson had taken Rukia to his own place. He would turn her into a wife and guard her in a house surrounded by a strong fence and a gate made of steel and fierce dogs to guard it!

Yes, Peterson had erected a barrier between him and his girl which he, Hasara, would not easily remove. Why hadn't he killed him when Hasira wanted it done? His death would have been worth the bride price he would have paid for Rukia. And he was prepared to do anything that would bring her to his side.

"You should have killed him," Hasira reminded him. Hasara looked at him. His eyes were still fixed on the floor. "You should have killed him," he repeated. "Perhaps his death would have compensated for my disappointment. He should have died."

It was as if he was speaking to himself. He was silent for a stretch and then added: "I had wanted him to die as soon as he had handed me the cheque. I don't know which devil alerted him at the last moment. Twenty million shillings has just slipped through my fingers! What's worse, I have lost three hundred thousand shillings organising the whole thing! Three hundred thousand! Going down the drain in the hope of earning twenty million shillings which I'll never see!"

Hasara looked at him; still he had not understood. He only thought Hasira was wasting his valuable time. Why should he come to him with his sob story instead of nursing himself in his own house? And, in any case, what was he pitying himself like that for? Was it because of the three hundred thousand shillings that had gone 'down the drain' as he had said, or the twenty million that had slipped through his fingers? And why on earth should Hasara come to him with his woes while he, Hasara, had his own troubles too?

Hasira was merely wasting his time. He needed to go out and plan how he could see Rukia again. He was about to tell Hasira this but restrained himself when he saw him get to his feet and fix him with a hostile look, as if he would have loved to strangle him.

"Don't you know that these people are behaving like demi-gods?" he barked at Hasara.

"Which people?" asked Hasara, taken aback.

"You know that people who are really free in this country are very few?" continued Hasira, as if he had not heard him.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Do you know that we are all their slaves, sweating day and night and spilling our blood for their benefit and that of their children and even concubines?"

"But whom are you talking about?"

Hasira continued to fix him with a look of hatred.

And after a long silence he raved: "You don't know who they are, do you? You don't know, Hasara? Don't you know that you are a mere ass, born to slave for others? Don't you know that you're a mere parrot, born to entertain some lazy fools? Look at yourself, Hasara! What thing of value do you possess? Of what use is life to you in this world? Look at your bed! Worse than those made for their dogs!" He paused for two long minutes. When he spoke again, the anger had gone out of his voice.

"Listen, my friend. We fought it out together during our childhood. We have licked their boots ever since we were children. Old age is now creeping on us. And they want us to continue licking their boots. They employ every kind of trick to keep us trapped in this mire of poverty to deny us freedom. They mock at our efforts to liberate ourselves from the bonds of poverty and misfortune. Do you remember what I told you when we were

children, Hasara? That I'd do everything in my power to emancipate myself from this culture of slavery and poverty; didn't I say that? I have done everything in my power to achieve this. I have tried to live like them and to imitate their tricks. But they wouldn't let me. Now what do they want? Do they want me to buy a pistol and invade their banks? Do they want to lure me into doing something reckless so that they can trap me and send me to jail for life, or even hang me?" He paused again and looked at the roof.

"Look at them and how they cooperate", he continued, "They advance themselves bank loans which they never pay back. They teach each other tricks to steal from the Government and nobody ever intervenes. They award themselves scholarship opportunities, so that they get far better educated than us. They make sure they have better medical facilities while we're left to die like beasts. And as if that's not enough, they award themselves licences for the most rewarding lines of business. Where are we? We are condemned to slaving for them forever!" he paused again.

"They don't want us to attempt anything to liberate ourselves!" he continued after a while, "They would never never let us do that!" He forced a smile, one that made him look more terrifying. "But there's one strange thing about the whole affair. They don't want us to get anything out of life, yet they don't want us to die. They want to keep us alive. You know why? They want us to live on in order to serve them!" Slowly he moved away from the hard seat and slumped onto the bed with its hard cotton mattress.

"Listen, my friend," he went on. "I want you to understand one thing. Our lives are just as valuable as theirs. You must always remember that. Whether they like it or not, that's the truth. Having taught us how we should fight for our survival in this world, they are sending us outside the country to fight for other people. Most

of us do not understand. But you and I do. We have come from afar together. We shall not let up until we have triumphed!" He laughed again. This time it was a genuine laugh, a human laugh.

That devilish laughter that had hovered around his lips a short while ago had now gone. "Forgive me for the way I've talked today, Hasara. My blood has boiled a bit. It's no laughing matter losing three hundred thousand shillings and missing twenty million into the bargain. Let me explain. In short, I have been trying to transact a deceptive business deal. This is the language they understand. Deception. I had twenty million shillings in the pipeline. I had planned that after Peterson had made out the cheque to me you'd seize the next available opportunity to kill him. I know he would not have taken the loss of twenty million shillings lying down. He would have raised hell and made things too hot for me. His death would have meant my survival.

"But now listen. This time they have won. I came here to tell you that there is no more need for killing him. Leave him alone. But in two days or so I'm coming to see you for something more important. If I find it necessary, I'll bring along a pistol and teach you how to use it." He rose to his feet and made for the door. "Will using a pistol scare you, Hasara? Just think of it. Only a single bullet fired could enable us to grab a million shillings. Or twenty million!"

Without even waiting for Hasara's reply he turned and left. After a short while Hasara heard the sound of his car driving away.

Politics! Hasara thought when he was again alone in his room. So even Hasara had turned into a politician! What was the meaning of it all? The politicians preaching politics and the common man preaching politics! What was politics? A rod with which to chastise people or a shield for defense? Look at this Hasara languishing in his bitterness for failing to reach their standards. Suppose he fought

his way to the top and became one of them? Would he remember those he had left further down the ladder? Would he remember us? Hasara laughed as he shook his head.

It was becoming increasingly hot. Although all this while he had had only a towel around his waist, his body was soaked in sweat. Again he remembered his dream of buying a fan: but what would have been the use of it in a house that had no electricity. And where was he to get a modern room with all the electric fittings when it had taken him so long to secure even this one which he was compelled to share with two other friends of his? The house itself was almost crumbling and no one in his right mind would have thought of bringing electricity to it. Every time he looked at it, Hasara felt the house was like a potential explosive, waiting for even a slight earth tremor to bury alive all the inhabitants. Yet there was nothing he could do about it.

He felt fatigued, but he managed to drag himself to his feet and walk out for some fresh air.

"I see life is not treating you badly, kid," the wife of one of his co-tenants was saying. She was scantily dressed to relieve the oppression of the heat. The night dress she had was so light that Hasara could see through to the contours of her private parts.

"Why do you say that?" Hasara asked.

"When people with big cars start visiting you, it's a good sign." She smiled. "In a few days' time this place will not be good for you."

Hasara laughed: "There's nothing to it, my dear. We seem to have been sacrificed to poverty and the rich are not eager to help us up. Whatever we do never improves our lot."

"Why?" the woman wanted to know.

"The reason is simple," Hasara replied, "Without we poor folk, there would be no rich people. And the rich ones never allow

us to disappear from the surface of this earth. So we have to exist side by side with them, but only to serve their interests."

"Is that true?" She laughed. It was as if she was beginning to realize the significance of that philosophy.

"That's the truth."

Hasara took over a pail from one of his co-tenants who had just come out of the bathroom. The man had been in a grumpy mood since morning. He never bothered to greet anybody and when he was greeted he did not respond. Nobody dared ask what was wrong. It might have been because this was his third day of going hungry. You never know, he might even have been awaiting conviction in a court of law the following day.

Hasara filled the pail with water and dragged himself to the bathroom. It was used communally by all the tenants. It served also as the latrine and was already nearly flowing over with human waste. Worms from the pit could be seen wriggling all over the floor. He placed the pail near the pit, hung his towel on the piece of sacking material that served as the door of the facility, and began scrubbing himself with laundry soap and throwing cold water over his body. Then he dried himself with the ragged towel and left.

Back in his own room he applied some lotion to his skin, combed his hair and put on one of the brand new suits Hasara had bought him. He completed his outfit with secondhand shoes and walked out. Outside he met his co-tenant's wife, still scantily dressed, coming from buying a loaf of bread which she held in her hand.

"Where are you going so early?" she wanted to know.

"Just round and about," he replied, just to get her off his neck.

Where was he going? Hasara asked himself as he headed towards the road. He had no specific destination. This aimlessness

had possessed him ever since Rukia disappeared with nothing to suggest where she had gone. He would walk from street to street but all his evening walks would end up at the Indiana Hotel. He had been told that Rukia had left the hotel for good, but he still had a hunch that somehow he would bump into her there.

He would go to a nearby soft drinks kiosk where he would order his drink and settle down to watching the entrance to the hotel. Already the proprietor of the kiosk was showing signs of getting bored with him.

Today he did not feel inclined to going back there, but something kept whispering to him that he would surely see Rukia there. And he felt it in his blood that if they met again this time, they would never separate again.

"Didn't I tell you that fortune is already smiling on you?" teased the woman. "How come you don't stay in these days?"

"There's nothing to it, darling. Only troubles."

He crossed into Ifunda Street that branched from Manda Street. At the junction of Kigogo Road and Mikumi Street, his attention was drawn to by some boxers hanging at the entrance of a nearby bar. He looked at his watch. It was eleven o'clock in the morning! The opening time was still hours away. Was this bar breaking the regulations? Knowing these people so well he was sure some of them would stay there till well past midnight, making merry and drinking. Just where did these men get the money to spend on drinking for twenty four hours?

He walked to the bus stop and mingled with the crowd of commuters waiting to board the few buses that plied Dar-es-Salaam streets. He was lucky. A bus destined for the Old Post Office, well in the city centre, pulled up at the station just as he arrived. There was a scramble for space although it was already full. After elbowing away other commuters he managed to get a

standing space inside.

As soon as he alighted from the bus in the city centre he hurried towards the hotel without giving as much as a glance to the ocean behind him. The bus stop was very near the shore. He crossed the patch of wilderness that had long ceased to give any pretense to being a garden, crossed the road and then hurried along the pavement along City Drive. His walk brought him to Samora Avenue which, as always, was full of multitudes. It was when he came to the Samora Avenue-Morogoro Road junction that he convinced himself he did not know exactly where he was going. He paused for a moment, his eyes surveying the terrain. He smiled inwardly at the thought he was deceiving himself by pretending he did not know where he was going.

He was still nervous about going back to the hotel, but something inexplicable was driving him on. He had not braved a rough ride in the bus all the way from Magomeni to the city centre for nothing. He knew in his subconscious that he longed to be at the Indiana Hotel. His desire overcame the embarrassment of enquiring about the same girl over and over again.

Five minutes later found him at the reception talking to the lady receptionist he had met there so many times before.

"No," the receptionist told him. "She hasn't come back. Sorry for the inconvenience." Hasara was humiliated, especially by the fact that the girl had told him this before he had even asked her. The smile on her face was derisive.

"Why are you so much after her?" she now asked.

Maybe he had lied to her, but he did not intend to lie again today. He decided to ignore the question and instead he greeted her.

"I'm fine," she said in reply to his greetings. "And you?"

Hasara saw something in the eyes of the girl. She seemed to

give him a suggestive wink.

It did not surprise him though. Many a girl had given him an admiring look. Sometimes they gave the impression in their way of looking at him that they would have liked to swallow him alive. This one was only one among many. She had a face worth taking interest in but Hasara knew her beauty was artificial, the kind brought on by expensive cosmetics. This was obvious from her artificial woolly hair, bleached skin and expensive dress.

"And now tell me, handsome," the girl was saying, "Why are you moving the earth to look for this Rukia? It is as if she has you tied to her apron strings!" She had deliberately said this to attract his attention for she had been quick enough to see that Hasara had almost forgotten her presence.

"That may be so," he replied, now a bit upset, "But all I know is that I simply wish to see her."

"Is that true?" she mocked, "Judging from the look on your face, that girl must have given you some honey to taste and now you want to have all the honey in the hive." She gave a seductive laugh. "But sorry you're a bit too late, Someone else has come and removed the honey and the hive. The man who took her from this place seems to be an important personality. And let me tell you something: this big man of course has the money to buy the love of any woman he wants, but Rukia seems to have virtually enslaved him. I wouldn't be surprised if this very moment we are talking they have already wedded." She laughed again.

"This girl," she went on, "must have used a powerful charm to hook a man like that. I wish I knew the medicineman who sold her the charm..."

Hasara fixed her with a puzzled look. Her next words were wasted on him because he was not actually listening to her. The only thing she had said which still rang in his mind was "... you

have tasted some honey and now you want the whole hive of honey combs..." This brought him back to the world of bitter reality. He had asked himself many puzzling questions about himself in relation to Rukia. Had he at least tasted the honey he would have felt a bit comforted. But here he was suffering on account of a girl out of whom he had so far got nothing. Just why was he suffering like this, even missing his sleep, over her?

She was beautiful; there was no disputing that. But how many beautiful girls had he seen? Just what was so particular about her that he wanted so much? He could not compete financially with the man who had paid for her to stay in the hotel and then removed her to some other place. But there was this thing irresistibly compelling him to meet her again.

"Are you going without even bidding me farewell, darling?" the receptionist asked him.

The question jolted him from his dream. He turned round to look at her. He tried to speak, but the words stuck in his mouth.

"Suppose she turns up, this girl of yours," the receptionist was saying. "Where shall I tell her to find you?"

"Eer...er..." Hasara stammered, "tell her anything!" He paused then shook his head. "No, tell her I'll come back to see her."

As Hasira had said the day they first arrived in the city, there were signs of good times in Dar-es-Salaam. Although they had come from a rural area where food was grown, it was here that people had enough to eat and throw away. And the left-overs, left to linger for long in the dustbins, assured them of a daily meal.

Few weeks later, when they were growing familiar with the city, they began to learn the value of money. This was after they had been conscripted into a gang of other delinquent youths like them who had a far wider knowledge of the city. These city 'veterans'.

as they called themselves, guided them to little dumps scattered all over the city from where they could pick rotting food and fruits. They led them to those 'European' suburbs, where richer people lived, and there they picked up more valuable things which they sold to people in poorer suburbs. Their favourite haunt was the major dump at Tabata where, if you searched hard enough, you would come up with articles of value which would fetch a handsome price. Sometimes, when their wanderings produced nothing, they would find themselves at the Kariakoo market complex where they descended into the basement and picked up rejected fruits.

The things they collected from the basement were later sold to people around the market. This business had attracted even children with parents and homes, and they would stay with the vagabonds until their parents caught up with them sometimes with the help of the police.

With their discovery of this, life became comparatively comfortable. They used the money they earned to buy for themselves clothes and other possessions of little value, including cigarettes. Sometimes they visited drinking places and took their share of alcohol. Later on they even began to smoke bhang. Had you asked them why they took to smoking it, they would have told you that it lulled their senses and filled them with courage. Their adventures in the city also included climbing the walls of stadiums to watch football matches for free and gate-crashing at cinemas.

It was the cinemas which had held a particular attraction for Hasara, particularly those which depicted violence and gun-fights. He liked particularly the ones where the underdogs were pitted against the powerful and would be thrilled when the underdogs triumphed. Among the film stars he liked in particular was Bruce Lee, and whenever he found the opportunity he would try his hand at boxing and karate. This training became very useful to him later.

In their gang knowing how to defend oneself was necessary as there was also a lot of bullying. It also helped in the scramble for valuable objects in the refuse pits. The boys would sometimes fight fiercely for the possession of such.

One day a boy was knocked down in such a scramble and he clutched at his foot as he limped around. They thought he had only sprained the ankle, but the fact was that the leg had been broken. As usual nobody bothered much about him. Those who had beaten him to a valuable find disappeared and left him unattended. They were surprised when three days later they returned and found him at the same place, his leg grotesquely swollen.

Although they took pity on him, none of them bothered to do anything about his plight. When they returned a few days later, they found the spot on which the injured boy had lain piled with fresh garbage. Nobody knew what had happened to the boy; maybe he had died; maybe they had buried him alive in the garbage or maybe some good Samaritan had rescued him.

The boy's plight had shocked Hasara. It opened some wound that was slow to heal in his heart. It made him double sore about the injustice of condemning other human beings to this kind of indignity while others got all the good things of life. Whenever he tried to discuss this with Hasira, the latter would get bitter and merely rebuke him: "How many times have I got to tell you that life is a battle? All men are like beasts fighting for their survival. Every one of them is ready to swallow the next man. Unless you are geared to put up some fight, they'll make you their slave or bury you alive!"

All this was hard for Hasara to understand. What kind of battle was it Hasira was talking about? Was it like their fighting one another for the dirty crumbs of food picked up from the garbage?

Would one call that a battle? The underdog pined against the underdog while the well to do looked and laughed? No. He did not understand why he had to be foraging for food in those God-forsaken places or why he was alive in this world altogether. Why had he been born? It was from that day that he had begun to ask himself who his parents had been and why they had abandoned him to suffering.

He relapsed into his habit of maintaining a sullen silence, the kind of silence that his mates took for weakness. One of them one day tried to wrest his possession from his hands. He struck at him and landed such a devastating blow on him that the boy sprawled to the ground.

The boy never dared challenge Hasara again, and from that day on he became a hero among his mates. The younger ones would run to him to report those who bullied them.

"That was good," Hasara congratulated him. "I like boys who can stand up on their own and face any situation. You'll always be a young brother to me. Don't let anyone bully you. And if anyone proves to have superior strength, make haste and call upon me to help."

The incident cemented their friendship.

There was a game they liked most and it involved hiring a bicycle. One day Hasara hired the bicycle for five minutes, but he literally disappeared with it. The owners realized too late that their property might have been stolen. They combed the neighbourhood for Hasara but all was in vain. When Hasara met him three weeks later he was completely changed. His trousers, shirt and shoes were brand new. Money jingled audibly in his pocket. He even decided to buy him a lunch in a restaurant! For the first time, Hasara sat at a table waiting to be served.

"Where's the bicycle?" he asked Hasira.

"I've sold it."

"What? Why did you do that?"

"When will you grow up and stop asking foolish questions, Hasira?" Hasira asked, apparently annoyed, "For how long do you think we'll continue living on crumbs picked from the dustbins?" He paused for a moment and then went on: "Go on eating. I've got to go. I'm looking for a room to rent and when I've found it I'll come and fetch you so that we can stay together."

Hasira was dumbfounded. What was Hasira talking about? A room? That they would now live in a room instead of spending their nights in unfinished buildings? This was more than good news! He waited eagerly for the promised heaven in a room, but it never came to be.

With Hasira having deserted the gang, the bullies who thought Hasira had relied on him were now bent on taking revenge. "Now you'll see," said Pongwe, the big bully he had once beaten. "Your father is no longer around and I'll now teach you a lesson."

"What father are you talking about?" Hasira asked him.

The reply to that question was a blow he never expected. He saw the second coming and successfully warded it off. But he did not take all of this lying down. He replied with a kick to Pongwe's belly which fell just short of hitting his private parts. Hasira gave him another kick. Pongwe seemed to be losing the fight. But his four friends who had been cheering him on stopped doing that and decided to intervene. They ganged up on Pongwe's side, but Hasira fought them bravely. He felt proud of himself fighting a gang of boys older than him. He likened himself to film stars like Bruce Lee, Fred Williamson and Chuck Norris. Thus even when a missile of stones rained on him he did not care. A short while later he fell down, blood spurting out of his nostrils and mouth. They

dealt him further blows and when they had finished with him, they abandoned him on the spot and went away laughing.

Hasara's suffering was intense. With difficulty he dragged himself away to an obscure street corner, where he lay for two days. When he had regained his health he tried to continue with his drab life, but he knew his enemies would not respect him until he had avenged himself on them. For this reason he looked for Pongwe everywhere.

One day he met him around the Kariakor market complex selling tomatoes and onions he had collected from among the rubbish heaps in the basement. He greeted him with deceptive politeness and then told him: "So I'm back!" Pongwe started as if he had come into contact with an electric current. He had half a mind to escape, but shame prevented him from doing so. He put his basket of rotten merchandise down and stepped aside from his customers.

"So you want me to kill you?" he challenged.

"On the contrary, it's I who has come to kill you!" Hasara answered boldly.

Pongwe aimed a kick at him. Hasara parried it and replied with one of his. The kick landed just where he had aimed it. Pongwe let out a terrific yell and his eyes stood out of their sockets. He collapsed on his back and lay writhing on the ground. A few minutes later he seemed to stop struggling. He lay still, his eyes still standing out and his tongue dangling out of his mouth.

"Murder!" one man cried out.

"Yes!" another joined in, "It's murder!"

Then there was a stampede. Some people were running away from the scene while others ran towards it to see what had happened.

Hasara, who was now stunned and dazed at the same time, was surrounded by people who fixed him with fearful looks. At his

feet, the inert body of his playmate lay.

When the police came an hour later, they found him still dazed. They carried both Hasara and the dead body; Hasara they sent to the police station and the body to the hospital mortuary.

They say there is no rose without thorns. The fifth day of Peterson's hermitage in the house he had bought for his girlfriend began to reveal to him the thorns in his garden of roses.

One could say Rukia was like a beautiful rose which the eyes would never tire of gazing at. Her voice was like some sweet music that would never irritate the ears. Her manner of speaking, her behaviour both in bed and around the house, her sweet smile whenever she was with him - all these were like recreation to Peterson. But somewhere in his heart was a gnawing feeling that he was beginning to get tired of all this fanciful life. What was worse, he had begun to see the signs of boredom in Rukia's eyes as well, although she tried hard to hide it. He thought that what both of them needed was some time away from each other so that they would be starved of the presence of the other. This brief period of separation was imperative if they were to enjoy the trip they had planned to make together.

This morning, after they breakfasted, Peterson put on his grey suit, adjusted his tie and began to peruse some documents in his brief-case.

"I'll take a quick ride to the office," he told her.

"When do I expect you back?" she asked.

"As soon as I have finished doing a piece of work there," he replied, watching her closely. But he had never succeeded really in reading Rukia's face. He wondered if he did not detect some signs of comfort in her at the fact that he would be away from her for so long. "But I'll try as best as I can," he added, "to come

back early. I hate to leave you alone."

"Do you think I would have allowed you to stay so long away from me in this city which is full of corrupted girls who know how to steal men from other girls?"

irony
Women! Peterson suppressed a laugh. Was she already beginning to doubt his fidelity? Was she forgetting that actually it was she who was stealing other women's men? Aloud he told her, "There's no beautiful girl in the city who can dare compete with you. It's the truth. And no girl or woman will make me forget you."

"Men!" Rukia mocked. "They all say that. But as soon as they leave their women behind they become devils. You would not be surprised to find a man holed up at a bar corner with an old hag that can hardly stand up to his wife in looks."

"I'm not like that," he said and rose to his feet.

Rukia barred his path. When he looked at her, he saw her tongue sticking out. He put down his brief-case and embraced her in preparation for the inevitable kiss. It was long. Her tongue ran from the mouth to his nose and ears. It was not until three minutes later that they stopped, arms wound around each other's waist.

"I'll take a taxi and leave the car to you," he said. "It will give you the opportunity to learn driving while you're on your own. A learner who never parts from the teacher never masters the art." *proverb*
He paused and scrutinized Rukia's face, which was alight with joy. "On my return," he added, "I'll bring along another car so that the one I'm leaving behind becomes yours for good."

Tears of joy escaped Rukia's eyes. "Tell you what, Peterson?" she whispered, "You're not a man. You're an angel. You're so good..."

A taxi pulled up in front of the house and interrupted whatever

she was going to say. She planted another quick kiss on him as he entered the car.

His heart was heavy, leaving Rukia behind like that. Her eyes were full of affection, her mouth seductive and her whole frame exuded sex. Throughout the journey to the office he felt tempted to tell the driver to stop to allow him go back to her, but he restrained himself.

His office was as he had left it. The only odd thing about it was that the "IN" tray which was piled high with files and unanswered correspondence while the "OUT" one was empty. His eyes hurried over everything. Perhaps what required his immediate attention was the tender he had won from one of the government ministries for the supply of some goods from West Germany. The quotations were ready and indicated prices twice the official ones. Behind the paper on which the quotations were typed was something inscribed by hand:

"We had to postpone our meeting two days ago because you did not show up. Please sign the forms and return them to us bearing your stamp. Your LPO has already been prepared. And, mark you, the prices include our cut."

Peterson smiled. He signed the documents and placed them in the "OUT" tray.

For some time he settled down to answering the mail piled up on his table. Then he summoned the secretary to give her some instructions.

Grace, still dressed in a manner clearly calculated to tempt him, entered and gave him a cynical look, as if to tell him that he would regret ignoring her signals for so long.

"Excuse me, sir," she said. "I forgot to inform you that your wife, Mama Sonny, has been ringing for the past two days asking for you."

"What does she want?"

"She didn't say. Perhaps she just meant to chat you up a bit."

Peterson said nothing.

Grace was not all that blind. She had already detected a dot on the white sheet of Peterson's marriage. She knew without being told that another woman was responsible. She had seen the contentment in Peterson's eyes (although men are not that easily contented) and she knew he was the one shaking the foundation of his marriage. She wondered who the lucky girl was who had made the usually frigid Peterson fall for her. She felt jealousy mounting in her and a glow of indignation smouldering in her against the girl she had never seen. Grace also knew that there was better opportunity for hooking a married man than when the relationship between him and his wife had soured. With this knowledge she now put more seduction in her eyes and voice. "Now tell me, boss," she said, "what should I tell my sister, your wife, in case she rings up again?"

"Tell her I'm away on a business trip," he answered all of a sudden without thinking. "Tell her some urgent business summon has taken me to Nairobi and that on my way back I'll call in Zanzibar."

Grace smiled: "Some business summon! How about taking me with you, being your private secretary? You know your poor secretary hasn't been to such romantic places as Zanzibar and Nairobi." She laughed coquettishly.

"Some other time," he said. "You'll certainly go with me on the second trip."

"Is it a promise, Boss?"

"It's a promise."

"How thankful I'll be!" she remarked, her eyes softening.

Peterson smiled. In his heart he was pitying Grace instead of

admiring her. What exactly did she want? *There are girls who were born with naturally seductive eyes but yours are not, Grace. Trying to be seductive simply makes you ugly. I wish you'd seen Rukia!*

The office began to bore him after only a short time. As he was about to leave, Grace informed him that Bougwan, one of his great friends, was on the phone, wishing to speak to him.

"Hallo, Peterson!" Bougwan said, "You're so elusive nowadays. You're not found at home nor in the office and you don't come to our meetings! Just what's the meaning of it all, man? Have you hooked some glamour girl who has decided to take you into her own house?"

Peterson forced a laugh. "We'll, I'm around and that's all. It's just that certain things took up so much of my time..."

He did not want to expose Rukia to company like that. He was particularly anxious that Bougwan should never be introduced to her because of his unique way with girls.

Peterson respected Bougwan though. True he did not do so well in business, but he always had money to spend. He also seemed to have a special knack for solving difficult problems. It would take him only two days to procure a document that would take others months. If you wanted to see a Minister and were being put off by red tape, the man to see was Bougwan. He would lead you to the Minister by the hand as if taking you to see a brother of his. He needed a single day's notice to arrange a meeting with the President. The following morning would see you at the State House, talking to the President.

Soon after replacing the receiver the telephone buzzed again. This time it was a business call from Italy. He spent some minutes on the phone. Having promised to telex in some figures that his client wanted; he replaced the receiver. He sat at his table and

worked at the figures involving customs duty, sales taxes, and so on. In no time he had six fullscaps full. He summoned his chief accountant and directed him on what to do. "This is for our Italian man. Work out these figures well and have my secretary type it out. I want it ready by tomorrow."

When the chief accountant had gone, Peterson too hurried out.

"I won't be back till tomorrow," he told Grace, placing his hand on her shoulder.

"All right, boss," Grace replied.

Outside the office he was lost on where to go. It was time for lunch, but he didn't feel like going to eat alone in a restaurant. He also felt ashamed of going back to Oysterbay where he had left Rukia so early.

Then a sudden desire to visit his home descended on him. He took slow steps towards the taxi rank. The first car he came to had no driver. The driver of the second ran up to meet him. As he was about to open the door, he realized that the door on the other side of the car had been flung open by another passenger who was helping in an old woman of about sixty-five or so.

"Sorry, sir" the young man told him. "I didn't know you'd already been taken on." He was about thirty and Peterson observed the striking resemblance between him and the old lady. He wondered whether they could be brother and sister. That seemed unlikely. They were possibly mother and son.

"Never mind," he told the young man, "I'll hire another car." He gave them another curious look. Mother and son! What happiness was there more than a man knowing his own mother?

This thought recalled to his mind the burning fire of puzzlement about his own mother.

It remained like a wound in his heart which had refused to heal. Now and again some thought or some sight would open it

up. Whenever he acquired a new friend, whether male or female, he would be introduced to their mothers or they would proudly tell him about them. But he had no mother to introduce anyone to, or to talk about.

Oh, yes, he was making handsome profits but they could not compensate for his motherlessness. What made it worse was that he did not know his mother's crime.

He did not know what she had done that made them avoid talking about her or telling him anything about her. For this reason, he appeared healthy on the outward but in his heart he was a sick man, weeping and withering away at the thought of the mystery surrounding his mother. He had tried to forget his woes by taking to drinking, but he had soon abandoned the habit after realizing that it did not solve his problem. What he wanted was not a drink but a mother. A woman. It was then he had begun to lead an amorous life, but the many women he met never satisfied his longing for his mother.

He almost despaired. Then came the evening he would never forget. He could stand the suspense no longer. He went to his father in his room "Listen, Father!" he demanded. "I want you today to tell me nothing but the truth about my mother."

"How many times" his father asked him, surprised, "have I got to tell you that I don't want even her name being mentioned in this house?" Peterson could detect fear in the old man's eyes.

"You'll have to tell me!"

"Suppose I don't?"

"Then I cease being your son today! I can't stand being a son with a father but no mother. I'll leave this house and the country altogether and I won't return; maybe only my dead body will be carried back here!"

Peterson had never seen fear written so large in his father's eyes before. It was as if somebody had knocked his head against an electricity pole. His eyes dilated, mouth agape, and he remained as if in a stupor. Then tears began to roll down his face.

Tears! That was something Peterson had never seen in his father's eyes. He nearly knelt before him to apologize from the deep feeling of pity he felt. But he felt he too did not deserve to be left to suffer so much. Today had to be the end.

"My son..." his father panted, "don't you know that by enquiring about your mother, you'll bring about my own death?" He was now sobbing visibly. Peterson said nothing.

"Why do you do this to me, my son?"

Still Peterson could not reply. He still wore that stubborn expression on his face, determined to unravel the mystery.

"Very well!" the old man thundered in a deep voice that baffled Peterson. "Very well," he said again, "Come to this room tomorrow and I'll tell you everything you wanted to know." He waved his son away.

That night Peterson never ate or slept. Anxiety tortured him throughout and he cursed down for delaying, as if with its advent his mother would come riding on the early morning clouds. Thus he was the first to wake up. After cleaning his teeth and taking a bath, he went to his father's room and knocked.

No reply.

This surprised him. As a rule, Mr Peter was never one to sleep like a log. Whatever happened during the night, even if it were only a slight sound, he was sure to hear it and talk about it the following morning. Having knocked for a long time in vain, he tried to push the door. He was surprised to find it unlocked. He stepped into the room where a shock was awaiting him. His father's body was lying calmly on the floor instead of being in the

bed! On the side of the body was a tin of sleeping pills which only the other day had been full. Today it was empty. Peterson panicked.

For a long time he gazed at the body, dazed. And then he noticed a piece of white paper in the dead man's hand. He wrested it out of the inert hand, hoping it carried a solution to the mystery surrounding his mother. It turned out to be a note of inheritance, bequeathing everything the old man had to him. In his anger he tore the paper to pieces and fell upon his father's body with a shriek.

The taxi pulled up at the gate of his fenced-in residence. Some strange atmosphere seemed to surround the dwelling, and he had a premonition that all was not well. A unique silence seemed to have gripped the place which was now void of the usual happy sounds of his children and the bustle of servants. Fear lurked in his heart tempting him to go back the way he had come, but he resisted. After the elderly guard opened the gate and greeted him with a bow he walked towards the main house.

It was in the living room that he saw the first signs of life. His two children, Sonny and Happy, sat on a large sofa, turning the pages of an illustrated magazine spread out between them. Their looks rather scared him. Happy's frock was rather dirty and her face seemed not to have received a wash that morning.

The two children lifted their eyes to look at him as he entered. Sonny did not look at his father long; he soon averted his eyes and pretended to go on reading the magazine. Happy seemed enthusiastic to see him. She jumped to her feet and ran to meet him crying, "Father's here! Father's here!" Then she abruptly stopped and asked: "Where've you been, papa?" Peterson lifted her up and kissed her.

"I've been on a journey," he told her.

"A journey? To which place?"

Peterson was seized by a feeling of guilt that was intensified by the accusing look his son, Sonny, had fixed on him.

"Where've you been?" Happy insisted. When she saw that the reply was long in coming, she added, "Papa, Mama is ill."

It was as if that was the kind of bad news he had been waiting to hear. He had never known his wife to be ill. It was only maternity problems that had landed her in hospital.

He could not help feeling something was amiss. He mounted the stairs up to the bedroom. The door was open. He pushed it and entered the room with faltering steps.

He could not believe what he saw. The bag of bones spread on the bed could not possibly be his wife. The only signs of life emanated from her eyes, which were open and barely visible in sunken sockets. Her teeth were bared in an expression of indignation and anger.

It could have taken someone with the heart of stone not to pity her. Peterson felt tears begin to form in his eyes. What could have happened? Had she taken some kind of poison? Was it that she had eaten nothing for a whole week?

"Gloria!" he called in a trembling voice, holding her hand "Gloria! What's happening?"

Gloria! It was like music in his wife's ears. He had never called her by name ever since Sonny was born. The name 'Mama Sonny' had taken the place of Gloria. And the name disappeared with something else important to her: his love. She recalled that they had loved each other so much before their marriage and shortly after, before Sonny had been born. And then she had witnessed his love for her subside and disappear altogether. His spending nights out of home was the final proof of lost love. She remembered three days earlier when he had taken her to bed and failed to satisfy

her longing. It was the worst insult a woman could take.

Mama Sonny had resolved not to give in. She had firmly decided not to show any sign of defeat until he handed her the divorce notice.

Ever since that morning three days ago she had found herself weeping day and night without realizing it. Although she would be starving, the sight of food would revolt her. Even the will to take care of her looks deserted her. She had all the cosmetics she would have needed, but she lacked the strength and will to apply them.

In her defeat it surprised her to find herself longing intensely for his return, never taking her eyes off the gate. This despite the fact that she expected a divorce anyday. And each day she had awaited this return in vain, drained of a certain amount of her strength.

And today he was back! Here he was, calling her name with all the affection he could muster. Mama Sonny wished she had the strength to get up and embrace him, remain in his arms until the end of her days. But this seemed to be wounding her pride. She thought it better to put up some resistance.

"Go out!" she mustered enough strength to tell him.

"Let me take you to hospital..."

"Go out!"

"Gloria!"

"Go out!"

This surprised Peterson. Does this woman know what she is doing, he asked himself? Does she know the state she is in? For a while he looked at her in silence. He felt convinced that if there was someone who could be of help to her, then it was a doctor. "Listen, Mama Sonny," he started, "Don't you know that your condition is bad?"

"Who are you to tell me what my condition is like?" barked Gloria. "Or do you fancy yourself the only man in the world? And tell me, when you married me, did you find me a virgin?" She laughed. The laughter was more horrible than her words. "Heed to me and get out. When we meet again, I want you to have completed all the arrangement for a divorce." She withdrew her hand from his and turned to sleep face downward.

Peterson rose to his feet and left. He felt like someone coming from a rendezvous with a spirit.

He drove towards Oysterbay in his Pajero. He drove at high speed, expertly dodging other cars, until he came to the Oysterbay area which had less cars. In his mind there was only one dream: to see Rukia. Her beauty, her affection and her compassion were the things he needed most at this moment.

Rukia was rather suprised by his sudden entry and sullen face.

"Just what's wrong, darling?" she asked him.

Peterson kissed her without saying a word. Then he released her and went to the fridge to look for a drink. He badly needed a whole glass of whisky. He tried unsuccessfully to force a smile.

"Tell you what, darling?" he told her, "My head is in a whirl today. Come into the room and comfort me. I badly need your help."

"I'm very tired today, darling," she protested.

"Me too," he said. "All I need is your embrace. Please do not delay it."

"What about supper?"

"That can wait."

They did not eat that evening. Deep slumber overtook them both and transported each to a dreamland.

Chapter 5

ADMITTING fatigue to a man, and especially a man like Peterson, was like a big joke to Rukia. A woman who had chosen the bed for her profession should never confess to being tired. It was prohibited for a woman in her profession to keep a man tantalized throughout the night.

But Rukia could not help failing in her duty tonight. "Yes," she said to him, "I'm tired." It was the truth; the truth that had dominated her thoughts, her blood and her whole being, so that it came out of her mouth of its own accord.

She had once been a liar, a good one at that, using deception as the shield with which to fight the battles of life. But now the screw that had connected that shield to her body had come off loose after spending yet another day with Hasara. It was only yesterday and she was still feeling the warmth of his body and the hope he had enkindled in her heart.

Hasara had no material possessions to give her; the only thing he could afford her was the light of hope which now shone in her heart and exposed her sins before her eyes. Those sins included the lies she had told. That was why this evening she had told Peterson the truth: that she was tired.

But she somehow took pity on him. This was the man who had given her invaluable material possessions, gifts a man could not make to a mere lover; the man whose marriage was probably imperiled because of her; the man who could easily ask for her hand in marriage and lead her down the altar.

And how had she repaid his generosity, goodness and genuine love? She had snubbed him and given him her back throughout the night. Wasn't that enough to wring pity from anyone for him? And when this pity flowed from her heart out to him, it was not in jest but in earnest. For she had divorced Peterson decisively from her heart. She did not see how she could go on pretending to love him or any other man for that matter.

Her meeting with Hasara yesterday and spending some time with him during which they had bared their hearts to each other had seemed to be the end of her aimless life, a life of sin and rebellion, ~~one~~ full of hitches. Now she felt like someone under a shade poised for a fresh start.

Their meeting had been accidental. Rukia, itching to master her driving, had been driving aimlessly in town. She had stopped at the shopping centre and gone on a shopping spree, buying things which she did not need. She had then gone to a grocery and filled her basket. Then she had begun her return journey. She had driven into Azikiwe Street from Samora Avenue. Next to Mawenzi Hotel she had seen a group of pedestrians waiting for a break in the motor traffic to cross the street. Among them was Hasara.

She had spotted him easily, for he was standing ahead of the rest, a newspaper in his hand. He seemed very tired, sweat pouring from his face and soaking his shirt so that he looked like someone on whom water had been poured. She also noticed that he felt indignant at the refusal of the motorists to give the pedestrians a chance to cross the street. It must have been such a shock to him to see a Peugeot 505 pulling up at his feet and a sweet female voice calling his name. His shock must have been greater when on peering into the car, he saw none other than Rukia!

"Rukia!" he called out in his surprise. Happiness lit up his despairing face as he formed a sweet smile.

Rukia leaned across her seat to open for him the front left door. Hasara entered and sat beside her.

Rukia drove on. On their way they talked happily and laughed; they were so full of joy that Hasara never got the chance to ask where they were going. Thus it took him by surprise when the car pulled up in front of an attractive bungalow facing the Indian Ocean, and a guard sprang as if from nowhere to open the gate for them.

"Welcome in," Rukia told him.

"Whose place is this?" he asked her, finding his tongue for the first time.

"Mine."

"Yours?"

She led him into the living room, richly and expensively furnished, and invited him to sit on one of the cushioned sofas.

"Feel at home," she told him as she entered another room from where he heard her talking to a servant.

From where he sat, Hasara surveyed his surroundings and his eyes almost fell out of their sockets in amazement. He marveled at the expensive furniture, the wall-to-wall carpet dotted like the skin of a leopard, four sets of couches, a large table with a glass top, two loud speakers encased in silver pots, impressive air conditioners and other things. He had never seen so much money spent on furnishing a house.

Rukia seemed to be reading his thoughts as she reappeared with a tray supporting various kinds of drinks. She did not allow him the opportunity to ask her questions aloud. Instead she asked him what he would have liked to take and when she had made his choice, poured the drink into his glass. Hasara began to drink slowly.

He fixed her with gratified and admiring look which pleased

her. Without realizing what was happening, they found themselves engaged in an intimate conversation. They felt like long-lost lovers, meeting for the first time, each thrilled by what the other said.

It was when the cook came to announce that dinner was ready that they realized they had been in each other's arms, fondling each other. The cook was eyeing Rukia with a warning and accusing look. They exchanged glances and burst out laughing.

They walked into the dining room hand in hand.

Hasara had never been treated to such sumptuous food: carefully roasted chicken; fruit of every sort in bowls; rice and other kinds of tempting delicacies. There were also bottles of drinks with which to wash down the food.

They sat at the table and fell to eating. Having eaten nothing since morning he could have swallowed a whole chicken and a half, wiped the rice plate at a wink and cleared the fruit before feeling satisfied. But when the time came he lost his appetite.

Having merely nibbled at the food, he abandoned his spoon and began to wash his hands.

"Are you satisfied already?" Rukia asked him. She also did not eat well. Having nibbled at the leg of a chicken and tasted a few roast potatoes, she had taken to drinking while waiting for Hasara to have his fill.

"I don't need the food," Hasara told her, "Seeing you is like food to me."

Yes, it was true. Rukia also recognised that it was true and it pleased her. Again, holding hands, they left the table and went into the bedroom. They ignored the seats and made straight for the bed. Rukia's hand left his shoulder and began to play with his young beard. Her soft touch thrilled him and comforted him at the same time; soon he found himself resting his legs on Rukia's lap.

"What does this mean, Rukia?" he asked.

"What does what mean?"

"This thing you're doing to me."

"What am I doing to you?"

"Don't you know?" he asked hotly, "Don't you know what you're doing? Here we are, showing each other how we love each other. We behave and act as if we'll never separate again. But then you'll leave without giving me a warning and I'll never see you again, as has already happened. Then you'll reappear and disappear again. Why is this? Don't you know you're like a spirit to me, appearing and disappearing when I least expect it? There's a lot I'd have liked to ask you, but I don't know how to begin."

Rukia's reply was long in coming. She knew she had a lot to tell him. She longed to tell him nothing but the truth about her whole life, to lift before his eye the veil that hid her past. She would have liked to tell him everything this very moment. But she was so happy that she did not want to spoil her happiness with an account of her filthy past. Instead she found herself talking a great deal and happily about happier subjects that she had hit on accidentally.

Then a thought which had never crossed her mind dawned on her. What would happen if Peterson came in suddenly and found this young man at her side? And what if he decided to drive her away from his possessions?

Would she be able to resume her wandering life in the streets? But then what was it that she wanted which would surpass what she got from this young man?

As these questions tormented her, Hasara seemed to be reading her thoughts and rose to his feet, pulling her up. "I think the time has come for our parting," he told her, "Please come and give me a lift to Gogo Hotel. From there I'll catch a bus to Kariakor."

"Why so early?" she protested, "What's the hurry for?"

"Do as I tell you. If that's impossible, then let me walk all the way."

"Hasara!" she pleaded with him. "Be with me for a little while longer. I still long to hear your voice and talk to you."

"So you desire to go on talking to me? Don't you know that even a fowl has a home to go back to? If you really wish to be with me, why don't you come to my place?"

"Hasara!"

They looked at each other in silence. Rukia's eyes were filled with tears which emphasized her beauty. Hasara could not avoid their power. He held her hand and led her outside.

All the way they said nothing until they had come to Magomeni and Hasara began to give her instructions on the way to his place. When they arrived all eyes were on them, especially those of the women who spent much of their days sitting under verandahs watching passers-by in the streets below. The arrival of Hasara in a car driven by a beautiful woman must have thrown them off-balance.

It was a wonder! The car had actually stopped in front of the most humble house on the street and who came out of it but Hasara, the handsome loafer!

"Welcome in, Rukia," he invited her.

"No," she replied, "Not today. Tomorrow, darling."

"All right."

"Wait for me here, please."

"You can cross out the please."

Rukia drove back to her place. All the way back she had felt that the car was so big she needed someone else in it. At home, the loneliness intensified. Each of the rooms seemed too large for her to be in alone. Every sound irritated her. Her ear could no longer stand even the sound of the music she loved. She only wanted one

thing, or rather one man: Hasara. Her longing for him was so intense that if Peterson had not appeared, she would have driven back to Magomeni Mikumi where he had his humble dwelling.

Fortunately for her, Peterson also had his own troubles. This was like comfort to her; she was relieved when, after telling him she was tired, he demanded little from her, falling instead into a deep sleep which lasted throughout the night.

Feeling tired!? Why hadn't she felt like that when she had been compelled to sleep with four sailors who had been starved of sex and had descended on her as hungry as hyenas on a bone? That had happened in Mombasa. She had endured their strengths and even feigned delight.

At that time Kenya had already bored her and she felt extremely home-sick.

The incident with the sailors on a ship had made her return earlier than she had planned, for the sailors spread wild tales about her throughout the port of Mombasa. They said, for example, that she was a little girl with a barrel between her legs. This lowered her esteem in the eyes of her prospective customers and spoilt her business.

Thus one evening she had crossed the border and found herself in Tanga. The next morning she woke up to find herself on a bed in Mkonge Hotel. Her partner was a giant of a man with a muscular chest and a protruding belly. His buttocks protruded too, but surprisingly he had a thin neck and thin legs. He was groaning instead of snoring, making noise like that of a wounded buffalo. His gaping mouth all but concealed his black teeth and this made Rukia hate him all the more. She could not remember how she had come to be willing to spend a night and share a bed with such a man. Had she been drunk? Had she lost the power to control her

drinking? These questions rang in her mind as she left the bed and made for the bathroom.

Even after she had taken her bath and put on all her clothes, the caricature of a man was still groaning in his sleep. She reached for his trousers and inspected its pockets. In one of the pockets she found two thousand, four hundred and six shillings. This was certainly a left-over from his previous night's spending. In the second pocket she found sixty thousand shillings neatly tied with a rubber band. She hid the money in her box which was full of her clothes.

Then she fished from the box a bottle of sleeping powder, which she blew into the nostrils of the sleeping giant. His breathing changed and became like that of a man half-dead. Rukia was sure it would take him six more hours to get rid of the effects of the powder. She smiled at the thought that by the time he woke up, she would be hundreds of miles away from the town. Four hours later she was air-borne, flying over the tall buildings of Dar es Salaam.

Soon after the plane landed at the international airport, she had secured a host. This was an ageing Arab who, throughout the flight from Tanga, had been fixing her with a pleading look. As they were waiting for the luggage belt to convey their belongings, she smiled at him and he drew closer to her.

"I think I've seen you somewhere," the old Arab ventured. "But where are you going?" Rukia asked him, ignoring his remark.

"Don't worry. You're welcome where I'm going." Under normal circumstances she would have ignored the invitation. But being new to the city, and not knowing where she would go, she decided to fall for the invitation. The old Arab was so bowled over that he interrupted his journey to Pemba and chose

to sleep with her at Transit Hotel, a few kilometers from the airport.

She made sure that the old man did not have a wink of sleep; instead, he spent the night weeping like a child until lodgers in other rooms stopped their laughter thinking something serious was happening. The following morning the Arab could not walk. He spent the whole day in bed. Rukia spent the day with him, making him suffer all the more. The third morning, he gave her three hundred shillings! It was like an insult to her.

"Whom do you think you're giving that rubbish?" she chided him, laughing cynically, "Whom do you think you slept with? Your sister?"

"All right," murmured the Arab. "Take five hundred and not a cent more." Rukia looked him up and down contemptuously. She wanted to spit into his face, but hesitated when she remembered that that was not the kind of punishment he would never forget.

Instead, she pretended to accept the money and just as the Arab stretched out his hand, she aimed a blow which landed just where she had intended it. This stunned the Arab. She dealt him another blow which brought him back to his senses. And when he prepared himself to retaliate, she hit him with her head, which prostrated him on the bed. Blood sprang from a wound in his face and from his mouth.

"Fool!" she cursed.

"Forgive me, please," the Arab panted, "There's three hundred thousand shillings in my pocket. Take it and spare my life."

"I don't need your money!" She spat into his face as she said this. She picked up her luggage and left the hotel. She took a taxi which drove her into the city. She booked a room at Mawezi Hotel for three days. On the fourth night she put herself on hire in the streets. Being new in the city she began at Margot, now called Ushirika. Without delay men flocked around her. She would have

had a man for every night for eight nights if she liked. Her newness to the city seemed to be an advantage supplementing as it did her beauty and youthfulness.

Not only men were impressed: even girls fought to win her favour. One of these girls once claimed that accompanying Rukia had proved gainful as it helped her attract men. It was this girl who persuaded Rukia to check out of the hotel and go live with her in her room at Kurasini, a room which her host rarely used anyway.

Men came to her.

Men abandoned her.

Until recently when Peterson turned up. Peterson with his vast sources of funds... the man she had intended to punish. And after him had come Hasara whom...

Yes, what did she intend to do with Hasara? She could not say what. All she knew was that she longed to be near him.

Yes, Hasara seemed the man to fill the void that had been left in her heart by the many men she had had.

That morning after Peterson had left she took a bath, did her hair attractively then spent sometime making herself up. She put on her favourite kitenge and adorned her golden jewellery. After reassuring herself of her looks in the mirror, she walked out.

"But you haven't had your breakfast," the cook reminded her.

"I'll have it when I'm back," she replied as she started the car for her journey to Magomeni.

Hasara's was a house-hold name in Manda Street and the surrounding areas. Men and women talked about him with bewilderment. They tried to figure out how Hasara, a poor man living in a humble room, could have attracted the love of the most beautiful girl ever seen on that street, a girl wearing gold and

owning a car. They thought she was making some mistake visiting an inhabitant of this poor street. They knew she had come from those suburbs reserved for the rich, such suburbs as Oysterbay, Msasani and Mikocheni. What did she want from Hasara? Hasara meant loss. What did she want from him if not another loss?

Hasara himself had questions that puzzled him too. That morning Rukia had arrived earlier than he had expected. She had entered with all the confidence, as if she was his wife. She had found Hasara preparing to make his tea on an old kerosene stove. She had taken over from him, prepared the tea and sliced the dry break which was to go with it.

After they had breakfast both stretched themselves on his bed. Each was eager to hear the other talk.

Hasara knew it was a torture for Rukia to lie on his bed which was rough, unlike the comfortable one she had at Oysterbay. He also knew that the bugs had maintained a truce only to give them time to forget their existence and they would soon begin to attack. On top of that, the extreme heat was bringing sweat to her face. It was so oppressive that she was soon forced to take off her outer wear and remain only with the inner. To his surprise Rukia seemed not to mind this inconvenience. She was happy and relaxed. She appeared happier here than in her own home with its air conditioners and cushioned beds.

But that is hardly what baffled Hasara; rather it was the way he had been feeling ever since he had set his eyes on this girl. He might have been poor and living in deprivation, but he was a known ladies' man. He had seen it everywhere he had gone. Almost every woman he had met had shown signs of desiring him. He would get any woman he wanted. All of them, from unmarried girls to married women, seemed to be fascinated by him.

Knowing well his poverty, he was determined to use his good looks as the only weapon for revenge and satisfaction. Thus many a woman had found themselves in his bed, the married and the unmarried alike. He was sure he punished them. But it surprised him to see the women who had been his victims actually enjoying it. It surprised him too to find out that the woman who he thought suffered worst at his hands was the one who would love him most. They continued to come for him, until he feared that they might queue up outside his room. This made him begin to avoid some women and accept only those he thought would not drive him into trouble. True he desired all of them, but he never happened to love even a single one of them.

From the day he had set eyes on Rukia his desire for all other women had evaporated. She was like the answer to the questions which nagged his mind about the fair sex. From that day, he had never desired another woman; nor had he given in to another woman's temptation. Those who followed him into his room were disappointed when he sent them away without as much as embracing them. All his desire for a woman was centred on Rukia. This same Rukia he had today lain in bed with as if they were twins.

It was this thing that bound him so hopelessly to her which baffled him. He had suffered, kept vigil and gone through all sorts of inconveniences because of this girl. Yet, whenever they met their happiness never went beyond talking happily together. Sex was still out of their scheme of things. It had been like that when they had spent a whole day yesterday; today she had been in his room half-naked and they had played in his bed, and yet nothing had come out of it. This is what had baffled Hasara. Why was it that, for all his craving for this girl, he could not be aroused

sexually? Those neighbours who envied him thought he was getting the greatest pleasure out of her. What would they say if they learnt that he was getting nothing?

He wound his arm around her attractive waist. She smiled. Then he fingered her chest. The firm breasts, electrifying to the touch, made his heart skip a beat. Rukia took the hand and plunged it into her bra while with the other he undid the supporters.

His craving for her was now evident in his eyes. Rukia was to him like a work of art on which the Great Artist had spent all His resourcefulness. He held the breasts, squeezed them and stuck them into his mouth. He rested his head on her soft chest and closed his eyes. The thrill that surged through him and the comfort that ensued were unparalleled. But behind the comfort he felt some kind of sorrow.

Rukia, like a good mother, held him tightly close to her, her hand working on him in a way he had never experienced before. Her fast fingers tickled him everywhere, going from the nose to the ears, to the chest and then the nipples. Greatly comforted, he gave in to her caressing with eyes closed. He felt like one transported from this world to savour the joys of heaven.

But for all that joy, Hasara still had that premonition of a tragedy to come. Could it be because all this caressing had failed to win an erection from him? Was that what bothered him? And why was the erection so long in coming while he had 'punished' women in this very bed, sometimes three of them in a night?

Rukia was not aware of the battle that was going on in his minds. She was contented with feasting her fingers on the body which she thought had all the male qualities about it despite being roughed by lack of care, lotions and even soap. She didn't mind it; somehow this body exuded comfort which lulled her heart. Her fingers ran down to the vital parts. Then all of a sudden she stopped.

Surprised, he opened his eyes to check what had made her stop. He saw her throwing away the last bit of clothing, leaving her stark naked. In a minute she was on her back on the bed, her eyes inviting him.

Her nakedness mesmerised him. He had never seen a woman so perfect before. Yes, her body would have sent any man crazy, even the ones with hearts of steel. He remembered a beautiful woman in the next street who had tantalised every sharp man in the neighborhood. She had a reputation of possessing a body worth ten million shillings. If that woman's body could be said to be worth ten million shillings, what was Rukia's worth then? It appeared like she had created herself, and in the way she liked best.

Rukia did not let these thoughts continue to preoccupy his mind. She rose a little and reached for him, this time her tongue and fingers busy working him up. She continued working on him with such skill, tickling every corner of his body until he felt like his heart was bursting.

Still the erection did not come. It seemed as if all her efforts had been wasted; he was merely like a child thrilling in his mother's fondling.

This stunned Rukia. All those efforts of her were enough to make any man helpless, writhing with desire like a fish being fried alive, and weeping. What was wrong with Hasara? For a woman who had never failed this was too much, and she felt anger starting to well up in her. She hid it behind a bewitching smile and told him in a most seductive voice: "I think you're tired, Hasara. How about our taking a walk first and coming back to it later?"

Hasara accepted her proposal readily. Looking at his watch, he was surprised to find it was quarter past four. How time must have flown!

They drove to town where they decided to go to a cinema. The movie seemed to be a boring one which Hasara had already seen and Rukia had on her own video cassette. They left the theater and went to Kilimanjaro Hotel where each took two beers and had dinner. But the quietness of the place soon bored them.

"Now where do we go from here?" Rukia asked.

"Let's go to a dance."

"Where?"

"At the College of Expenditure. There's a foreign band performing there tonight."

"Where's that?"

Hasara laughed. "It is at the D.D.C. Social Hall at Magomeni."

They drove to the place. They could hear the sound of the music even as they entered the gate.

She parked the car and bought the tickets.

The hall was full and noisy. Everyone seemed to have been intoxicated by the drinks and the music. Rukia and Hasara were soon infected by this excitement. That air of reservation that had been developing between them melted in the thrill of the moment.

"Let's dance," Rukia invited him, leading him by the hand.

"Can't we go on drinking a little?" Hasara protested.

"That'll come later."

They mounted the floor and began to dance. The music vibrated in their blood, love dominating their minds and youthfulness savouring the thrill of their closeness. In no time every jealous eye was on them.

The second number was slow. They danced to it, locked in each other's arms. Rukia had her eyes closed and head leaning on his chest.

Oh tell me, tell me, darling,

Please tell me...

What would you want me to do...
Orphan I am... no father... no mother...
No brother... no sister...
No lover... no friend...
Tell me, please tell me...
What did I come into this world for...
The song was done in a plaintive tone and it brought tears to Hasara's eyes. He felt as if it had been composed with him in mind. Holding Rukia more tightly, his mind raced from the hall and back to his troubled childhood.

"He has killed! He's a murderer!"
"Who has killed?"
"Yes, afande, he has killed. He's a murderer!"
It was like a song passing from the lips at the police station. Everyone of them stared at him like a creature from another world, with malice looming in their eyes. They marveled even more when they observed his tender age and the fact that he seemed not to realize the impact of what he had done. He was locked up at the station for two days. On the third day he was taken to court. His age, his uncertain parentage and the whines of those who were present at the scene of the quarrel between him and Pogwe made the magistrate relent and condemn him to ten years in a rehabilitation center.

The center was a better place than anywhere Hasara had been to. Here he was sure of food and a bed. He was given clothes to wear, and what was more he was also being taught how to read and write! Life seemed to benefit him; he was industrious in whatever lessons he was given. He was also good at sports. This pleased the authorities at the centre and they released him after only six years.

Had they known that he had nowhere to go they perhaps would not have advised that he be released. Although he pleaded with them and told them that he had neither parents nor home to go to, they had dismissed his as the plea of a delinquent.

Thus he was back in the streets pawning for food and sleeping in the cold. This time, having gained enough experience in the city and being much bigger, he never scavenged for food in the dustbins. So he looked for work. He could not find a better job than being a casual labourer, which brought him just enough to keep his body and soul together. But he worked hard; at the same time he was looking for a room to rent.

He had been on this job for only four months when misfortune befell him. One night armed thugs invaded the warehouse they were guarding with another watchman and which belonged to a wealthy Asian. Hasara and his fellow watchman were beaten up and locked up in a latrine. The bandits cleared the warehouse of everything.

When the police were called in the following morning, the first thing they did was to lock up Hasara and his colleague on the suspicion that they had collaborated with the robbers. The two remained in the remand prison at Keko for two years when they were released for lack of evidence.

Hasara had to begin all over again. The experience had made him bitter. He bore a grudge against himself, against humanity and the world in general. He became uncertain in everything he did, suspecting everything and everyone.

He was now prepared to take revenge for everything that turned against him. This made him liked and feared at the same time. He worked at all sorts of jobs that came his way. Whenever he missed work he would employ the tricks of survival that city toughies are used to - lying, bullying and cheating. He was still wary of the

intentions of other people which robbed him of permanent friends.

Only Hasira remained his regular friend, although they saw each other very rarely. It was Hasira who would assist him financially from time to time. But there was a gulf developing between them. While Hasara seemed to be sinking deeper in his poverty, Hasira seemed to be on the ascent.

Hasara never found out what his friend did which made him rich so quickly. What he knew very well was that whatever Hasira was doing could not be legitimate. Otherwise why was he so secretive about it?

Although he was fed up with his poverty, Hasara was not prepared for the kind of risks that seemed to be behind Hasira's ascent. He accepted the inequalities that he saw and developed a philosophy about them. To him the world had been created good. God had intended people to be equal, but somewhere something had gone wrong.

What was it that had gone wrong? Did the solution lie in politics? He had heard it said so many times that the best antidote to inequalities was socialism. Yet even under socialism only a few seemed to benefit while the masses were condemned to suffering. Had something gone wrong with socialism itself?

These questions bothered Hasara, but he never spent much time working out answers to them. Hunger would never let him: poverty would never give him the leisure for that. He had to fight for his survival and not spend valuable time meditating on such issues.

That was what he had been doing all these years: fighting for survival. Until recently when he had met Hasira again who had set him on this course of strange events resulting in his meeting this wonderful girl...

Rukia was now looking at him in amazement.

"What I'm saying is," she said, shaking him, "the music has

ended. When there was no response she became alarmed. "What's wrong with you, Hasara? Your thoughts are very far away!" He gave a start. It was then that he realized that the song had indeed come to an end minutes ago and that the floor was empty except for him and Rukia. They left, holding hands, and headed back to their seats. All the seats were now occupied. They found a comfortable niche somewhere in the hall bedecked with flowers, where they stood leaning against the wall and ordered their beers. After three bottles each they decided to leave.

"Where are we going now?" Hasara asked.

"I'll sleep in your room tonight," she said.

The only problem was where the car could be safely kept, but Hasara had an answer to that. Every Party branch office offered security services at night as a matter of duty. They drove into the premises of the party branch that was nearer Hasara's place and left the car there.

The humiliating failure during the day made Hasara mount the bed with a lack of confidence. He looked like a stranger in his own room. Rukia's body, smoldering with desire, beckoned him, but it surprised him to find that he was yet to get ready. Under normal circumstances this body, which seemed like an appetizing meal arrayed on the table, would have shot a wild desire surging through him. Now for reasons he could not explain it was long in coming.

Rukia seemed poised for revenge. She received him with a kind dramatic act designed to arouse him. She tried again and again but nothing happened. In the end she could no longer hide her disappointment and anger. She pushed Hasara off her chest and reached for her clothes. "Take me to where I've left the car!" she barked, "I want to go home."

Hasara looked at his watch. It was nearly half past two. It was

a risky hour in Dar es Salaam. He looked at Rukia. Her body was glistening in sweat and anger choking her, making her breathing difficult. Behind the anger he detected a smile of derision.

"Spend the night here," he told her, "You'll go first thing in the morning."

"Take me to where I've left my car!" she almost screamed, "Or I'll go alone." She slid into her pants.

"I've told you to spend the night here."

"I've never slept with a fellow woman!"

He had expected the insult, but when it came it hurt him. He was one of those men who never took kindly to an insult. Instinctively he struck out a blow which landed with a deafening impact on Rukia's right cheek.

Having not expected it, the blow stunned her. And although she expected the second, she could not dodge it because it came with an alarming alacrity. She made an effort to retaliate, but he caught her arm and rained more blows on her body. Never having been beaten by a man before, the shock dulled the pain coming from her cheeks. She stared at him. He was no longer the Hasara she had thought she knew, the Hasara who only a short while ago had seemed to her so useless as a man.

This time she saw him as the epitome of a true man. Not like the hordes of them she had met in the past whose proof of manhood was bribing her. He had proved his by striking her, an act which made her feel like a real woman needing male protection. It was the first time she had felt like that. Now she thought she realized her true position... she was a woman first and a prostitute second.

Unconsciously, she leaned on his chest and sobbed.

Her tears assuaged Hasara's anger. He stopped beating her and in his pity wiped her tears. And without realizing how it happened, he had a sudden erection. He threw her back on the bed.

She had a kind of pain she had never experienced before. She tried to reciprocate with all the skills she had known, but they all failed her. Instead, she let Hasara take the lead while she writhed below him like a fish that had been thrown on dry land. She asked herself what had gone wrong. How did she come to be like a professional who did not know her job, who let her customer take the command while she lay there, bereft of all the skills and deception which had bound men to her?

Then she heard the voice of a woman weeping! Her own voice! She was weeping from satisfaction, something she had never felt. The very thing men did under her power. Now the roles were reversed: for the first time she had met more than her match! She wept on, not minding whether or not occupants of neighbouring rooms heard her.

"Hasara!" she whispered. "You and I shall die together..."

Peterson felt as if he had been sitting on fire. Now and again he would rise from his seat and then return to it. Whenever the telephone rang he lifted the receiver apprehensively, fearing the worst.

He had not known exactly why this nervousness was ruling his life. He ought to have been happy. At night he had had the sweetest dream of his life in which he had revealed to Rukia plans to make her even more comfortable. It had given to him a kind of comfort he had never known before. He could not now remember the details of the dream, but it had been comforting and he now longed for the experience.

The dream had ran to a thrilling climax, but when he awoke, he had found himself sleeping back to back with Rukia. Some kind of intuition told him that she had been long awake although she now pretended to be heavily asleep and snored deliberately.

This was something new to him. Rukia had never in the past left him to sleep peacefully till morning. She would always keep him awake with her wild love-making, making him suffer and weep so much that the following morning he would be spent. She would then wake him up with sensual kisses planted here and there on his body.

In a mixture of anger and surprise Peterson decided to leave silently for his office.

But he found the office unbearable. He was left to battle with nervousness whose source he could not trace. His wife was in bad health, but he knew it was not this that made him so depressed and left him feeling like a hunter who had lost all his weapons and himself in the midst of a forest. Just what was the source of this depression? He could not tell.

All of a sudden the telephone rang. He let it ring for a while before lifting the receiver.

"We're Matty Enterprises, sir, wanting to talk to you about..." the voice at the other end of the line said.

He hung up on whoever was speaking, and then spoke to Grace over the intercom. "Grace! I'm not taking any calls today no matter the caller. Heard?"

"Yes, boss," Grace replied hesitatingly, "What if it is urgent and important?"

"You'll know what to do with it!"

He tried to lose himself in work but found it impossible. He would hold the pen long in his hand and whenever he attempted to write, the letters and lines would be out of alignment. He pushed away the files and stuck the pen back into his pocket. He called Grace and told her to mix him a drink. While waiting for it, he turned on the small television set in the office, bumping on a drama about police brutality in South Africa.

He tried to let the drink reassure him and the drama on the television take his attention. But after a moment he found that neither instilled confidence and reassurance. He turned off the TV and abandoned the drink at half-glass. He seized on a pretext to leave the office. He informed Grace that he was going out for his lunch.

"Are you coming back?" she asked him.

"It depends." The curtness of the answer surprised Grace.

She had expected that the drink would relax him, and then she would have reminded him of his promise to take her with him on his trip to neighbouring countries. She had looked forward to this trip, believing it would serve to establish a new kind of relationship between them.

Outside the office he remained still for a moment, leaning on the car. He did not really know where he wanted to go. Ten whole minutes passed. Then he entered the car, where again he remained still for some three minutes before driving away.

Even as he drove he was still undecided. On the one hand he felt he should drive straight home and see his wife and children; on the other he thought he should return to Oysterbay and see Rukia. He was not enthusiastic about either of the two options. He drove to an hotel which he was sure was not frequented by his friends. Although it had some reputation and was in the city centre, he had visited it only twice in the past. He parked his car and walked into the elevator which took him up to the bar. There he sat at a lonely table and ordered drinks.

It was four o'clock when he left the hotel and drove to Oysterbay. After parking, he looked around and wondered where Rukia would be. Her car was not in the garage. He unlocked the door with the key he had in his pocket. Then he entered the house.

The servants welcomed him with their usual officiousness

although he observed apprehension in their manners and eyes. But he did not ask where Rukia had gone. Instead he ordered a drink to be taken to him in the bedroom.

This large room seemed even larger without Rukia. It did not make him welcome; rather it repulsed him. He found some thrilling video tape, inserted it into the deck and turned the set on. He enjoyed the drama while slowly taking his drink as he reclined on the bed. From time to time he would glance at his watch and look nervously towards the door, as if he expected Rukia to enter any moment. Soon the drama on the video lost appeal. He turned off the set and instead turned on the TV.

When food was brought he pushed it aside after tasting it and went on drinking. He did not know when the drink got the better of him and sent him fast asleep.

He was aroused from sleep by the noise coming from the TV, which he had forgotten to turn off, and the cold air in the room which tortured his skin. He looked again at his watch. It was four o'clock in the morning! That meant he had slept alone in the house. Where was Rukia, he asked himself as he turned off the TV and regulated the temperature in the room? He changed into pyajamas, went into the bathroom where he relieved himself and took a bath. Then he returned to the bed and decided to sleep soundly.

But sleep eluded him. He was struggling with an upsurge of feelings: of anger, indignation and jealousy. How could Rukia do this to him? Had she forgotten all the good he had done her? Didn't she realize that he had done for her what he would never have dreamt of doing for any other woman in the world? How he had delivered her from a mire of poverty and shown her the kind of life a beauty like her deserved? Was it not on her account that his marriage now wavered and his wife withered away under his very eyes? Had she ignored the fact that he had demonstrated to

her the genuineness of his love, the love he had never extended to any other woman on earth? How could she be so ungrateful, sleeping out while he slept alone in a cold bed?

Tears began to fill Peterson's eyes. They were the tears of a man who had been humiliated, bitter tears of jealousy. He wiped them and tried a smile. *Why waste his tears on a drab like Rukia?* He now tried to see her in a new light. Of course she was pretty. She might have been pretty, actually prettier than many girls he had ever seen. But that did not mean she was the only one. She was simply one among many.

What was more she was just a pick, like the other picks he had had from the streets. But if that was so, why had he bothered to give her all this wealth? Just what had gone into him to do these impressive things for her? How could she have made him forget his wife and family? And what really was she if not simply another prostitute?

Oh, no! Rukia was not a prostitute! She was more. His whole being was plunged into prostitution. She was a prostitute with capital letters. Was there anything coming out of her which did not betray the fact of her prostitution? Her laugh, her voice, her gait, her look, her very thoughts. All these showed she had crossed the line to make her a rotten object of pleasure. A prostitute! She was not a beautiful girl, but a beautiful prostitute. Every inch of her, from head to toe, smelt of prostitution!

Peterson burst out laughing. If that was so, what had happened to make him lose his head over the prostitute?

Dawn is coming soon, he comforted himself. *Rukia will certainly reappear and I'll show her who I really am in this country!* He thought of doing something drastic to humiliate her, something deserving for a prostitute like her. He would turn her out to where she belonged - the streets! He continued to smile as

he played about with the thought, and then sleep mercifully overtook him.

When he opened his eyes again and looked at his watch it was nine o'clock in the morning. Still there was no sign of Rukia. It did not worry him this time. Instead he felt really good, like one rejuvenated.

He took a quick bath then put on one of his pairs of light trousers and a T-shirt. His dressing complete with rubber shoes and glasses to give his face its characteristic dignity, he left the house.

At the office Grace was surprised to see him. She had never seen him dressed so casually. It made him look younger, cheerful and more attractive.

He surprised her even more by resting his hand on her shoulder, his fingers giving the shoulder little drumming. In a voice full of affection he greeted her, "How are you this morning, Grace?"

"Quite fine, thank you"

"Very good. I'll summon you some time later to arrange together that trip to Zanzibar. Is that okay with you?"

"It..it... is... okay," she said hesitatingly. She had looked forward to the trip, hoping that it would avail her an opportunity for more than just sight-seeing. She had hoped being alone together in a foreign city or town would bring him closer to her and a relationship more intimate would develop.

Twice she had received calls summoning him to go urgently to his home. This had somehow dampened the hopes for the trip. Although the servant who had rang did not say what had gone wrong his voice had betrayed everything.

Thus although Grace would have liked to spend more time with him, she could not hide from him the fact that there was something amiss in his home.

She let him settle down for some five minutes before going in

to explain the situation.

"Who is it that rang?" he asked her.

The cheerfulness and youthfulness disappeared from his face as if in a wink.

"He said he's an old servant of yours."

"What more did he say?"

"He didn't say much. All he said was that as soon as you arrive, I should inform you to go home at once. It's his voice that scared me. He sounded as if..."

She did not complete the sentence. And Peterson was not listening to her.

His head in a whirl, he glanced at his watch once again. It was quarter to ten. He looked at Grace and she returned his look. There was sympathy and sorrow in her eyes. This made Peterson forget the immediate problem and fix her with a new kind of gaze. He was seeing her in a new light for the first time.

It was as if he was realizing now that she was not just yet another prostitute, the kind who would do everything to hook a man. No. She was now to him a girl full of gentleness and kindness. He wondered whether she too was unfaithful to her marriage.

"What are you going to do, boss?" she asked him.

"Well..." he said as if waking from some sleep, "I'm going there straight away." He rose to his feet and walked out of the office towards the car park.

He drove fast but carefully. A few minutes later he was at his home.

If when he visited his home after five days of absence he had marveled at the sudden change, today it was simply horrifying. A deathly atmosphere enveloped the house. It was as if brightness had gone out of everything: the flowers, which had not been watered for some time now, seemed to be withering; the eyes of

the servants spoke of fear.

Panic struck at him and he began to sweat. In a voice he could hardly recognize as his he asked one of the servants who stood aimlessly in front of him: "What's happening?"

It was the most foolish question he could remember having asked of anyone. Fortunately he received a down-to-earth answer.

"Just some problem, sir."

"What problem?" his voice was now controlled.

"The missus, sir."

"What's wrong with the missus?"

"Her condition was bad. We rushed her to hospital a few hours ago. Since midnight she has been in hospital. Her condition is very bad." The fit of panic which had begun to wane assailed him anew. This time it gripped him with a suddenness that overpowered him. He trembled while sweat broke on his face.

What's wrong with her, he longed to ask? But he did not ask it aloud. Instead he asked: "To which hospital have you taken her?"

"First to Hindu Mandal. But she has been referred to Muhimbili, Kibasila ward number..."

"Where are the children?" he interrupted the servant.

"They're inside."

"Have they eaten?"

"Yes, sir."

He wanted to go in and see the children but hesitated. He had not yet forgotten the accusing eyes of Sonny. He could not go to face that look again before seeing his wife and doing something to save her. Thus, without saying another word, he returned to his car and then started driving out.

Just then he noticed two old people approaching his house. One of them, a woman, was a total stranger to Peterson. Although she was ageing, one look at her was enough to tell anyone that

during her youth she must have been dangerously beautiful. But the man was not a stranger to Peterson. Actually he was the one who had brought him up, the man who had been his guardian, Kautipe. The Kautipe who had been his father's cook. He remembered that he had dismissed Kautipe the same day his father had died mysteriously.

Kautipe! Peterson thought as the old man waved him to stop. Just what did he want from him now? Had he not sacked him and warned him never to step into his house again? He longed to stop and give him a hearing. But he looked at his watch and remembered that his wife had been in a critical condition for many hours without his seeing her. He sped fast towards Muhimbili.

Although his wife's condition preoccupied his mind, the sight of Kautipe had called to his mind the scene of the morning he discovered his father had been dead.

He did not know for how long he had remained stunned by the body of his dead father until a hand clasped him and a voice full of commiseration soothed him: "Take it easy, son... come with me to your room where you'll rest a bit."

Peterson had rested his eyes on the speaker for some time without really seeing him. Then, like one possessed, he had seized hold of old Kautipe and shaken him vigorously: "So he has run away!" he had cried, meaning his dead father. "He's run away! Running away to avoid telling me something about my mother!" And then, as if seeing Kautipe for the first time, he had gazed at him with angry eyes and shaken him more vigorously, raving: "You see! My father has gone away just to avoid telling me the fate of my mother. But I'll have to know. You're not going to follow my father before telling me what you know about her!"

Trembling, Kautipe, looking more bewildered than ever, had

tried to extricate himself from his grip. But he could not match the strength of his youth.

"Speak... tell me..." he had shaken the old man.

"I'll speak!" Kautipe had said, alarmed.

"Speak!"

"Let me speak..."

"Speak!" the command had been followed by a resounding slap to the face of the old man. "If you don't tell me today what happened to my mother, I'll kill you!" He had slapped him again and gone on shaking him vigorously. Now trembling visibly and in a voice that was barely audible, the old man had said: "You'll kill me, child... I'm like a father to you... You'll kill me. Wait and I'll tell you... Your mother..."

Peterson had then calmed down and listened to him.

"Yes," the old man had then gone on, "She was not a woman to be proud of. I told you not to enquire too much about her, but you didn't listen to me. It's this stubbornness of yours that has killed your father. Think of the beautiful woman she was and the rich man she had for a husband, and yet she went to put herself on hire in the streets! As if the streets had not been enough for her, this very house was to her like a whorehouse! We, the servants, respected her... but now she would fall for this servant and the next moment she would be with another. She would drag a servant into the bathroom or into the bedroom..."

"Something was simply wrong with your mother, my son. Every time your late father was away on a trip, she would leave the home and spend nights elsewhere. Nobody knew exactly what she wanted."

This was not good news to Peterson. But it was not all he wanted to hear about her. He had wanted to hear everything. He had wanted to know if she was dead or alive, and if alive, where she

was. He had asked Kautipe if she were dead.

"No," Kautipe had replied. "She's still alive."

"Where's she?"

"Nobody knows. But what do you want her for, my son? Leave that woman alone. She wasn't..." Another slap had interrupted him, this time a stinging one which landed squarely on his face.

"Don't dare insult my mother again!" he had roared at him, "Who are you to judge her? And because of your disrespect towards my mother I fire you from this very moment... don't ever step into this house again. Now go!"

He had pushed him out of the house.

"I'm like a father to you," the old man had pleaded.

"Go!"

"... don't beat me."

"Go!"

"All right. If it'll please you, I'll seek out your mother and bring her to you..."

"I say: Go!" He had roared. "Don't you hear? Go out of this house! And if I find you hanging about here, I'll be tempted to kill you."

His voice was now thin but full of menace. His eyes had smoldered with a strange kind of fire. This had brought Kautipe back to his senses. He had ran out of the house wiping a mixture of sweat, blood and tears from his face.

It was after that incident that Peterson had come to his senses. With the help of the servants and the neighbors they had preserved the body of his dead father. They had buried him the following day.

It was when the mourning period was over and life returned to normal that Peterson had started the habit of picking women from the streets. Every beautiful woman had fallen into his trap. Some

had wanted to live with him for good, but he was not yet prepared for anything like it. He wanted to be, like a butterfly, free to taste the nectar from any flower he wished. Nevertheless it did not take long before this kind of life satiated him.

It had reached a point where the women seemed to him like toys made to attract attention and then satiate.

That was when he had decided to marry Gloria who had given birth to his children.

It took him only eight minutes to reach Muhimbili. He parked his car out of the reception hall and asked where Kibasila ward was. When he reached it the nurse on duty took him to the doctor who was treating his wife.

"Mr Peterson, I presume?" the doctor asked after shaking his hand, "I hate to say this, but your wife is in a very bad condition. She's in the casualty ward. We're preparing to operate on her. It's only after that we can talk of her chances."

"What could be the nature of her illness, Doc?" Peterson asked.

"We haven't been able to diagnose it so far. There might be some kind of complication, but an early investigation reveals that she's taken some kind of poison. We're yet to establish whether it was a case of an attempted suicide or abortion. And then she looks as if she has eaten nothing for several days and this is very serious. It will make the operation tricky. As for the condition of the twins she's carrying in her womb..."

Peterson could not stand to hear any more of this. The doctor's explanation seemed to be cutting at his liver like a sharp knife. With eyes closed, he interrupted the doctor: "I beg to see her, please."

The doctor hesitated.

"Only one minute, Doc. Please."

After pausing for a moment to think, the doctor decided to allow him.

He could not recognise her. What lay on the bed was all bones and skin waiting to be operated upon.

The only sign of life on this bag of bones was in her eyes which depicted pain and sorrow.

Peterson was shattered. He felt his mind and body paralysed. Then with a strength he acquired from he did not know where, he covered the distance that separated him and the bed and cried: "Gloria!" He took her withered hand into his. "Gloria!" he called again, tears streaming down his face.

Slowly consciousness dawned on Mama Sonny and she recognized her husband. She struggled to turn on her side and opened her mouth to say something. No word came out. She tried again. Peterson thought he heard something like 'darling' coming out in a whisper. Then the sick woman tried to smile. It was brief, then her face was clouded with a sadness he could not explain.

Every sign showed that Mama Sonny had a foot already in the grave. This scared Peterson and he could think of nothing else to say except call out her name "Gloria! Gloria! Gloria! Gloria..." He went on calling hysterically this until the doctor seized hold of him and led him out.

He did not grasp the extra explanation the doctor offered. He merely nodded and hurried to where his car was parked, ignoring the surprise on the doctor's face.

Only one thought was uppermost in his mind. To take his revenge on the one who was the source of this suffering his wife was going through: Rukia!

He would make sure the prostitute went before his wife to the land of the dead.

Chapter 6

"FOLLOW HIM!"

The taxi driver calmly received the order although with a bit of surprise. The man he was being told to follow drove a Pajero which had just slid out of the gate of the Muhimbili Hospital. He turned to look at the passenger who had issued the order. He was an old man. Then his eyes wandered to his companion, an ageing woman.

Being landed with strange and funny passengers was not something extraordinary to any taxi driver. This particular taxi, christened UNONO CAB, had plied the streets and roads of the city for close to seven years. Its driver had had various, if not all sorts of, passengers. Some had been of strange habits, others uttered strange words, but that was not important. All that mattered was that they had all been his customers and paid.

He could however not remember when he last took in such passengers as these two. They were as strange as they were baffling. He could not understand their deeds nor comprehend the meanings of what they said. They looked like peasants; their voices betrayed them as rural dwellers; but their deeds...

Take the old man for instance. His suit would have been admired by rural dwellers, but it was sure to be laughed at by the urban. The shirt, part of a Kaunda suit, was complemented by trousers of a different colour so that it looked quite unbecoming. On his wrist he had a cheap digital watch. His attire was completed by cheap boots. The heat of Dar es Salaam made him sweat profusely and he would wipe the sweat with the back of his palm. Three

✓ quarters of his head was covered in grey hair. He almost seemed out of place in this city, and yet he behaved as if he had lived in it all his life.

The ageing woman was even stranger than the man. Of course she looked like a new arrival - probably it was only yesterday or perhaps today that she had stepped into the city. But like with her companion, the city did not baffle her. More than that she looked as if she did not like the village life and was greatly fascinated by the city. Her eyes showed she was conversant with the ways of the world, her body suggested she had once savoured the pleasures of the city, and her face seemed to relive happier days in the past.

The two had surprised the taxi driver ever since a few hours ago when they had run up to his car as he had been dropping a passenger at Mikocheni. "We need your car," the man had said while the woman was already getting into the back seat.

"What's the address?" the taxi driver had asked.

"Follow that car!" the old man had said, pointing at the Pajero as it emerged from a house nearby.

The driver had hesitated, doubting their ability to pay if the journey turned out to be a long one. But the old man had cleared his doubt by paying him one thousand shillings in advance. "If the journey exceeds that price," the old man had said, "just say so and I'll add to it."

Still baffled the driver had taken off. He found no difficulty tailing the Pajero. The Bagamoyo Road was almost clear of motor traffic and the potholes made driving a bit difficult. At the junction of the Bagamoyo-Morocco roads he nearly lost the Pajero as he was held by a stream of cars from Msasani while it sped on.

Applying his long-standing skills in driving, the taxi driver managed to weave his way through the traffic and caught up with the Pajero at the traffic lights near the Salender Bridge. From there,

it was easy to follow the Pajero to Muhimbili where its driver parked and entered the hospital.

When he came out of the hospital some minutes later, the taxi driver had the opportunity to see the man he had been instructed to tail clearly. He thought the man's face was not strange to him, although he could not recall the name. He was expensively dressed, the value of his clothes at par with the car he drove. He looked to him like one of those youths upon whom Dar es Salaam had bestowed its blessings, Tanzania its smile and the world its approval. Of course it was clear that the man's face wore a sad expression, but that did not belie his prosperity. The taxi driver wondered why these old people were tailing this man.

It was as he was thinking of these things that he received the second command to follow the Pajero again as it left the hospital. He gave the two another look of surprise and then smiled inwardly as he started to follow the Pajero once more.

Kautipe had read the surprise in the taxi driver's eyes. He was aware that the man's mind was full of questions he would have liked to ask straight away, but he did not give him the chance. He and the woman at his side did not have the time for any other matter apart from that which had brought them to the city. It had been ignited ever since Peterson had demanded to know his mother.

He remembered how Peterson had slapped him in front of the other servants. Even Peterson's father's dead body had witnessed the incident.

It hurt him to remember that he who had beaten him was a young man whom he had brought up with his own hands. He had been like a father to him, and yet this very same young man had driven him out of the house as if he had been a fowl! And he had known Peterson would not have understood anything about his

mother without this woman he had at his side being present. From that day he had resolved to hunt for this woman, which had not been easy. He had gone from town to town and village to village until he had gotten her.

Fortunately, when Peterson had sacked him from the service he had saved up sufficient funds. During his service at Mr. Peter's he had been receiving everything free: food, shelter and all else. Moreover, he would now and again be rewarded. Thus when he left, he had something like seventy-four thousand shillings in his pocket. What more could an old man like him want from God?

Before planning how to spend this money Kautipe had made a vow. He had to find this woman and bring her to Peterson, for she was the young man's mother. The last he had heard of her was that she was staying with a woman friend at Kinondoni Moscov in Dar es Salaam itself. It was from there he had begun his inquiry. But it had been rather pointless, for the woman who had been the friend of Peterson's mother had claimed that her friend had stayed there for only three days and then left without saying where she was going. The woman herself, after many years of prostitution, was now making a living by selling illicit beer in this part of the city which had intricate nameless streets and suburbs.

Kautipe did not give up. He traveled to Ujiji in the Kigoma region, which he knew to be the birth-place of Peterson's mother. Ujiji is a small town and Kautipe did not find any difficulty getting to a location called Buzebazeba where this woman had been born. There he was welcomed into what had been the house of the parents of the woman. The people who now inhabited the house informed him that the owners had been dead for a long time now, and added they had never heard of the daughter he was seeking. They informed him also that the daughter - this woman at his side - was an accursed soul who had brought shame to her people, and even if she were

to come back they would have driven her away. Her people were also surprised to hear that she had had a husband and a child.

"Who's this man who married her?" they asked Kautipe. But Kautipe did not have the time to answer their questions. Thus he left Ujiji. After that, travelling third class on a train, he asked himself what his destination should be. The train from Kigoma was bound for Dar es Salaam but he did not want to go back to Dar es Salaam empty-handed. He scratched his almost hairless head wondering where he should go from there. It puzzled him where this woman might have gone after leaving the . Now he sought to find her. And it was then that it had dawned on him that he should look for her in every village. *In every village!* But how many villages were there in Tanzania? How many years would it take him to cover all the villages? Then it crossed his mind to look for her in the villages surrounding Dar es Salaam. Then he would cross over to Zanzibar. After that he would come back to the mainland and scour all the villages.

Two days later he was in Dar es Salaam. He had deposited some of his money at a bank, almost half of it. The other half he used to buy in bulk some goods he thought would be easy to retail, things like sugar, clothes and so on. This was to ensure that his source of funds did not dry up.

He had gone from village to village. Everyone of them had sort of scared him. Although he had been born in a village, he had been brought up in an urban atmosphere and all his life he had never been in a village. Whatever he knew of the villages he had read from the papers and it attracted him. Those politicians and journalists had romanticized the villages. There had been a time when he himself had been tempted to abandon the city and seek refuge in one of the villages. But now he was seeing the reality, learning first hand what the villages were really like.

It was still to take ages for the villages to attain the progress thrust upon them by the politicians and journalists. Kautipe thought the politicians had to conjure up glamorous pictures of the villages in order to impress upon the youth who roamed the streets of the towns into going back to their villages. But the way he saw things, the least paid town dweller was far better off than the average peasant in the rural areas. For the town dweller enjoyed all the amenities including being close to such facilities as hospitals, and was close enough to the leaders of the nation.

Kautipe even asked himself why up to that year people in the villages still lived in mud houses with hardly any amenities available to them. If only these politicians had sense enough to take concrete actions to improve the villages instead of merely preaching, Kautipe was sure the loafers and other ordinary people in urban areas would have been attracted to the villages. He found it ironical that while the politicians preached the virtues of village life, they spent far more resources in developing amenities and facilities in urban centres. These politicians, Kautipe thought, turned the villages into a dumping ground for the jobless instead of making them places where even the jobless of the cities and the towns would find something worthwhile to do.

His mind had been taken from these thoughts two years later when he came to the village of Geza Ulole and met the woman he had been hunting for.

The way he met her was like a strange dream. He had with him second-hand ladies' clothes which he sold. He had dropped the whole bundle at the village's market place and one of his customers had turned out to be the target of his wanderings.

"Nuru!" he had exclaimed as he jumped forward to embrace her.

"Kautipe!" she had cried back in surprise.

That Nuru became the hostess of Kautipe was something of a marvel, not only to Kautipe himself, but also to all the residents of the village. For this woman had been a mystery to the villagers ever since she had come to settle among them. They had thought she had been mistaken in choosing to settle in a village. Her good looks, her expensive clothes and her general bearing showed the villagers that she was not only suited to living in the city, but she had the ability to manage her life very well there. So they had thought she would sojourn there only temporarily. But they were surprised to see she was determined to stay. She put up a two-room house and acquired a maize plot. It had been obvious to herself and to the villagers in general that manual work amounted to suffering for her. But she displayed rare willingness to overcome the difficulties involved and she was soon able to acclimatize herself. After three years she had established herself as an exemplary rural woman who earned her living with industry.

Her house attracted many. Her maize plot was the envy of many.

But she remained a mystery to her fellow villagers. It was obvious to them that she was running away from her enamored past in major towns. She seemed to be poised to go away from humanity altogether and live in seclusion like a hermit.

This was apparent in the manner she avoided company and making friends. Even the unprincipled men, young and old, who would whet their nails like an eagle does at the sight of a chicken, had to withdraw them after seeing that she was not interested in affairs of the heart.

The advent of Kautipe intensified the mystery that surrounded her. She had welcomed him with apparent affection into her house and they had remained there for several years.

Nuru listened carefully and attentively as Kautipe begged her

to go with him back to the city to relieve the heavy load on the mind of their son, Peterson, who had seemed to go to pieces craving to know about his mother. She understood the trouble old Kautipe had gone through looking for her. But since she had renounced the city which had victimized and humiliated her, she was not prepared to return to it that early. The more Kautipe urged her to make up her mind the more she stalled.

She wished Kautipe could understand. But how could he? Was it possible for a man to understand a woman? Could one human being understand another human being well? What she knew was that she, Nuru, had tasted bitterness from the time she was young and sucked at her mother's breasts - the mother she had never known in adulthood. It was only after she had gained consciousness that some neighbors had hinted to her what had happened to her mother. The neighbors told her that the woman who had brought her up was her step-mother. Her real mother had died when she was only two years old. They had also informed her that her mother had been deserted by her father who had accused the poor woman of making love to an Arab who had fathered Nuru.

This hard life had made her mature fast. Being a half-caste, she had recognized early that she possessed a beauty different from the other girls' on account of the colour of her skin. She had also been aware that men in the village marveled at her beauty: the full buttocks, an attractive waist line, sexy eyes, well proportioned calves, a straight neck and a straight nose.

She had even overheard one man remark: "That girl's not one of us. She has the blood of the Indians running in her veins."

"No," another had commented, "She's a cross between an African and a Persian."

"That's not enough to describe her," another had added, "She's just short of being an angel."

An angel? She had asked herself again and again. What angel could be so miserable, brought into the world to suffer?

And as she grew up she had found she was not liked even in their home. Her father hated her more than he hated a devil. He would not miss an opportunity to insult and even beat her. Whenever he found a pretext to beat her, he did it as if determined to kill her. "What's she?" he would shout as he beat her, "She'll turn out to be even a bigger whore than her mother!"

Her step mother had not liked her either. She had made sure that she gave the little girl more work than she could manage. She would insult her, beat her and say nasty things about her. She would lie to her father to incite him to beat her further. As if that was not enough, she had not been allowed to attend school. Instead she had been the tiller of land, the cook, the baby-nurse, the wood-cutter and the house-help.

As if the world had not been through with her, her cruel father, who was nonetheless her source of bread, had died from a strange disease leaving her alone in the world. She did get a stepfather after that, but he had proved to be even more cruel than her own father. He had hated her like the devil hates God. Nobody knew why but when Nuru had been in his house three days he had twice attempted to rape her. And when she had thwarted his attempts by raising an alarm, he hated her even more and missed no opportunity to insult and beat her. One day he beat her so badly she fell ill for several days.

When she recovered from her illness the thought of running away had come to her. But where would she go? She had then thought of taking her own life.

It was when she was contemplating suicide that a glimmer of hope had shone in her life: betrothal.

She had had no decent clothes but rags; she always had been

dirty from smug and soil owing to her toil; her face had always been clouded in sorrow - but all these things had done very little to veil her potential beauty and men in the village knew it. It had not been long before suitors, young and old, began to ask for her hand in marriage. But as if they intended to make her their slave for good, her step-parents had discouraged every suitor.

It was when they saw neighbours obviously disapproving of their victimizing the young girl and looking for ways to assist her that the step-parents had allowed her to marry. But then they had chosen her a suitor who no other girl in the village would have desired to marry. He had been an old man really, well ahead of her in age by a whole sixty-five years. To make matters worse the old man had had five other wives who were older than Nuru's dead grandmother. As if that had not been enough, the old man was as dirty as he was ugly. The villagers asked themselves what brideprice could have attracted Nuru's parents (or guardians) to agree to give him the girl in marriage. But their conjectures and Nuru's tears had not prevented the girl from being taken by this old man to a village in Uramba, in the Tabora region.

To Nuru, it had been as if she had gone out through the back door and come back through the front into the same oppressive house. Her married life had been worse than hell. At night, the old man with the withered body and red evil eyes would not allow her to sleep although he did nothing beyond tickling her everywhere and calling her a prostitute for reasons known only to himself.

During the day she would suffer the wagging tongues of her five ageing co-wives who jealously thought she was enjoying herself more than they did. Worse, they had left all the house and farm work to her.

It was not long before she had found herself faced with a new problem. The old man had several children, some of them grown

up. The daughters had not hidden their hatred for her; they thought it was humiliating to give her respect due to their mothers simply because she was one of their father's wives. Then sons had posed a bigger problem. They desired her. Although none of them told her so, their desire had been obvious in their eyes. This had angered her husband even more and every night he would beat her for no reason at all.

"Now look, my daughter," a certain woman, a neighbour, had once told her, "Tolerance has its limits."

This woman who had advised her was not one of the villagers really. She only visited the village from time to time from the town. She had been about thirty years old. Her well-fed looks and beautiful clothes had shown that she lived in comfortable circumstances. Twice she had tried to talk to Nuru about her plight, but each time someone had intruded. This evening they had been alone at the village well.

"It's your own fault to go through all this suffering," she had told her. "Haven't you seen how beautiful you are? God! how men with pockets loaded with money would fight for you! Had you been in a town you'd have got men to bribe you with many possessions. They would have even bought you a car and built you a house. Leave this bush and come to the town and you'll find yourself transformed overnight."

This woman had only been one among several who had given her the same advice, but she had hesitated to follow it for fear of starting life afresh. That adage that you had better deal with the devil you know had ruled her life.

But now she had decided to give this advice some serious thought. Her suffering had been unbearable during recent days.

"If only I could find the fare," she had lamented.

"I'll give you that," the woman had assured her.

The woman had promised her not only the fare, but also to accomodate her for several days in the city. They had agreed they would leave the following day.

As the train which passed through that village arrived at night, the woman had advised her to escape barehanded without any luggage.

Two days later, Nuru had found herself in the town of Tabora.

She had been surprised to realize that the woman, whose name she now knew to be Pambo, was someone of repute in the town. She had had her own house, a large one with four rooms. Two of the rooms she had loaned to four other girls. One had been for her guest and the remaining one was hers. She had received Nuru into her house with a generosity the girl had never known before. She had been given clothes, shoes, face powder, ear-rings, necklaces and body lotions. In this way, when Nuru was decently clothed for the first time, the effect had surprised not only herself but Miss Pambo as well. She had exclaimed her joy aloud.

From that very evening the atmosphere in that house had changed. There seemed to be an endless stream of visitors to it, mostly men. Their eyes had devoured Nuru hungrily like monkeys devouring maize cobs. Nuru would hide from such looks in one of the rooms lying on the bed.

One evening she had found in Pambo's room a new visitor. He had been a tall young man wearing expensive clothes. He had sat on the couch smoking contentedly. On entering the room, she had been ordered to sit with the young man on the couch.

"This is your guest for tonight, Nuru," Pambo had told her, smiling mischievously. "As you can see he's as young as you are. His name is Halfan. And look here, Nuru. I'll go out for a while and leave just the two of you here. Chat this guest up. Fear nothing. Feel free until I return."

And as soon as Pambo had closed the door behind her, Halfan had ran his arm around her, his fingers exploring every part of her body. Few minutes later, they had been both naked on Pambo's soft bed.

To Nuru this had been a strange experience. It was a night remembered all her life, for it was then she had been initiated into adulthood having shed her virginity. It of course had been painful, but the pain had had some soothing quality to it - something that comforted. She had clung to Halfan for all she had been worth.

The following day Pambo had returned early. It had only been ten o'clock. She had found her still asleep. And when Nuru went into the bathroom, she had remained in the room counting the money Halfan had left. Five hundred shillings! Good beginning!

The next evening another Halfan had appeared. The following morning he had left another five hundred shillings. Soon Nuru had become a regular prostitute exchanging men with comparative ease.

In this profession her mistress had not allowed her to grow tired; nor had she been allowed to keep what the men had offered to herself. She had first to give everything to the mistress. It was then she had seen Pambo in her true colours - a ruthless business-woman who brooked no nonsense in her transactions. There was a day she had beaten Nuru for sleeping with a man who did not have sufficient money to offer.

Although she had been still so young, Nuru had felt something was amiss in the kind of life she was made to lead. Of course she now lived better. She now enjoyed herself. There was beer, there were clothes and there was money.

But she still had felt this was not the kind of life meant for a woman, to humiliate herself in this way. Ever since her childhood she had come to believe that the dignity of a human being consisted

in one man having one wife and one woman having only one husband. That was how God had created Adam and Eve. This belief had never left her and, although she was now temporarily enmeshed in this life of corruption, she had been sure a day would come when she would be emancipated and live in the dignity God designed for a woman.

After sometime, she had listened to advice again and left Pambo's service to set up on her own. It had not been difficult. She had found a truck driver who took her to Mwanza. He had her lodged in a hotel. When she realized that the man was running out of funds, she had abandoned him for other men. Soon she had grown tired of Mwanza and gone to other towns. Her good looks had assisted her everywhere she went and made things easy for her. Indeed, had she chosen, she would have been very rich and even built her own house. But always her conscience had accused her and urged her to quit that kind of life. She had ignored the fortunes she would have got from her customers and craved for the day her dignity as a respectable woman would be restored.

She had thought she had had her chance of starting afresh - this time on a path of dignity. This was the night she had met, for the first time, Mr. Peter who was now dead.

Peterson drove on, quite oblivious of the fact that he was being followed. He arrived at Oysterbay and parked the Pajero in front of the house he had bought for Rukia.

The steward who opened the door for him showed signs of apprehension but Peterson ignored him. He answered to his greetings with a nod.

He smiled with satisfaction to see the car he had given Rukia in the garage. This would make it easy to do what he had come to do.

It was when he entered the house that he saw the reason for the apprehension in the steward's eyes. Rukia was in the house, as attractive as always. But with her was a young man with whom she sat side by side on one couch. Rukia's hand was resting on the young man's shoulder while bottles of beer stood on the little table before them.

For minutes Peterson was stunned and stood in front of them, mouth agape. He had known that Rukia was a whore, but he had never imagined she was this rotten. Soon his shock was replaced by a fit of anger which surged through his blood. He remembered the poverty in which he had found this girl and the huge sums of money he had spent trying to restore her dignity as a human being. To cap it all, he remembered with added bitterness his crumbling marriage and the desperate condition of his wife at Muhimbili. All this because of this prostitute - this whore! And look at how she was now settled comfortably near her lover, grinning shyly and shamelessly without caring two hoots about him!

"Rukia.!" he growled, "Who is this?"

"His name is Hasara," she replied calmly in a tone that disgusted Peterson.

"I don't need to know his bloody name. What's he to you?"

"My lover."

The reply shocked him out of his wits. It was the truth, uncouth and direct. That was how he had liked the answer to be, but he had not expected her to have the courage to tell it to him so calmly. It numbed him. He had expected her to be on the defensive, to lie, apologize and plead. That would have made it easier for him to react as planned.

Peterson looked at the young man who sat there with all the confidence in the world as if nothing was happening around him. He immediately recognized him to be one of those homeless

vagabonds who roamed the streets. His cheap clothes and coarse body betrayed him, and it was obvious he had not had enough to eat. He wondered what Rukia or any other woman would have seen in him. He had the feeling he had seen the face somewhere although he could not remember where.

"Why don't you sit down so that we can talk like civilized people?" Rukia suddenly told him.

Peterson laughed. "Sit down with you? Listen, young lady. I think I can count myself the craziest man in the world to have fallen for and sat down with a bitch like you! I just can't figure out what devil possessed me and pushed me into your arms. But all that is now past. What brought me here is to tell you to leave. I give you only five minutes to leave this house! And if you don't I'll make you do it as deserves any bitch."

It had never dawned on Rukia that Peterson could have the gut to talk like that. It took her some time to admit that the insults were really pouring out of Peterson's mouth. Then her own anger, which had lain latent somewhere in the corners of her heart, surged forth. She stood up, panting.

"You dare call me a bitch!" she screamed at him.

"Why ask? Don't you know you are one?"

Still she could not believe her ears. To be called a bitch, in front of Hasara of all people! She had not been prepared for a quarrel. And why quarrel anyway? After her experience the previous night with Hasara, after being with him the whole day, she had come to an irreversible decision: to be with him always, to the end of her life. It was Hasara who had filled that void in her heart which other men had failed to do anything about. She had contemplated her life and realized that it had been aimless, like that of a bird. She possessed nothing - neither shelter nor farm. Now she wanted to change that. She thought of all the men who

had surrounded her - rich and poor alike. They had just been wolves ready to devour her. Only one of them was ready to protect her, and that was Hasara.

Yes, Hasara was everything to her. His looks satisfied her and made her long for nothing else. His body was enough comfort for her. Over and above that they had been reading each other's thoughts with their eyes, and it confirmed that they were suited to each other without saying this aloud.

She was not on just yet another of her prostitution games when she brought Hasara into the house as Peterson had thought. No; she had come to fetch her belongings and go to live with him. They had agreed that he would look for regular employment like other men and lead a decent life. She had not expected to meet Peterson here. But even if she were to meet him, she did not intend to be embroiled in a quarrel with him. Hers was to bid him farewell in a civilised manner.

But Peterson had insulted her and she thought she could take no more from him. She became determined to show that she too could turn into a fiend if she chose to.

"You call me a dog?" she panted.
"Ye..."

Peterson had not expected it. A woman's blow. It surprised him more than it hurt. He saw the second coming and warded it off, at the same time throwing a punch which Rukia dodged.

It had been a powerful punch with his whole weight behind it. Thus when Rukia so easily dodged it it sent him sprawling towards the floor. Fortunately he landed on the couch. He hastily rose to his feet and got ready to deal her another blow.

But Hasara, who all the while had been watching these things silently with an amused expression on his face, rose to his feet and rushed at him. Peterson threw a powerful punch at him, but

Hasara easily caught it and tightened his grip on his arm. Peterson could not wrest his hand; it was as if it had been gripped by steel pincers.

"Let go of me," he roared at Hasara, "Take your filthy hands off me" Hasara ignored the insult. Still gripping Peterson's arms he turned to Rukia and ordered her to sit. She obeyed, but the sweat of her fury nearly blinded her.

Hasara turned to Peterson. "Listen, brother. You are an adult with a dignity. Why don't you sit down so that we can have a talk?"

"Leave me alone, you sonofabitch!" Peterson raved. He tried to strike Hasara with his free hand.

"I think you need to be taught a lesson!" Hasara said, suddenly jerking him. As Peterson started, Hasara landed a powerful punch on the face that sent him reeling onto the floor. As he struggled to his feet, he received a kick in the stomach that sent him flying backwards onto the couch. He tried to get to his feet, but swayed and fell again. Already blood was oozing from his nostrils and mouth. Hasara was possessed by a strange, devilish desire to smash him, to tear him to shreds. All the fury of his past suffering came bubbling forth. All his hatred for society and mankind goaded him to commit his worst sin against a human being. He did not want this opportunity to punish and humiliate Peterson slip out of his hand. He would be humiliating and punishing the world which had been so hard on him.

He found himself on top of Peterson, registering devastating blows with a devilish ruthlessness that disregarded pleas for mercy. It was Rukia's shrill scream, which reached him as if from afar, that made him stop the act.

Looking ragged and completely messed up, Peterson made for the telephone. With great difficulty he turned to both Hasara and

Rukia and said: "I give you five more minutes, the two of you... at the end of that time you should have left the house. Or else I'm calling the police!"

He cursed his parents for a luxurious upbringing which had softened him unlike Hasara whom hard times had toughened. He would have taught them a lesson. He was hoping that as they left he would call the police and have them arrested all the same.

The scuffle had brought the stewards of the house rushing in to see what was going on but they stopped at the door stunned, not knowing what to do.

Then all of a sudden two old people entered the house. The man and woman seemed surprised. Only a short while ago they had been following this young man all the way from Muhimbili. He had been smart and clean, exuding wealth and confidence. Now he was broken and bleeding.

"What's happening?" a voice demanded.

Peterson recognized the voice and its owner. Kautipe! What does he want, he asked himself? He did not get the chance to answer his own question, for at the very same time Rukia had jumped from the couch and ran up to the elderly woman, crying: "My mother! My mother! Mother... Oh, mother!" They embraced each other and burst out weeping.

Hasara looked on bewildered.

Peterson's mouth flew open.

Kautipe fidgeted from where he stood.

After two minutes during which the women, mother and daughter, wept for the joy of seeing each other, they turned to the rest as if both intended to explain. Any on-looker would have been struck by the resemblance between them. The only difference was age, otherwise they were like two peahens which would have amazed people in the streets of Dar es Salaam with their

resemblance. "My mother..." Rukia went on to moan, wiping tears of joy. "My mother..."

"My daughter, folks," the elderly woman also moaned, "Rukia, my daughter... seeing her again after all these years!"

"Is she your daughter?" Kautipe asked aloud, "I had brought you in here to introduce you to your son, Peterson, and here we find him bleeding all over. Yet you spring other surprises on us!"

It was then that the woman remembered Peterson. She left Rukia and moved close to where Peterson stood, bewildered. She embraced him and cried; "My son! I hear you wanted to see me? Here I am, your mother!"

Peterson could not believe his eyes; nor could he believe what he was hearing. So this was his mother! Alive! Which meant he and Rukia were brother and sister! Was that possible? He looked closely at the woman. There was no jest in her eyes. His eyes wandered to Kautipe. Kautipe's solemn face affirmed that what he had heard was true. He was with his own mother! He avoided looking at Rukia who was now weeping in a strange way, different from the way she had wept a moment ago. Only Hasara seemed to be not yet infected by the strange atmosphere. Was it true or was it all a dream?

The mother's eyes followed those of Peterson. As Peterson's eyes fell on Hasara, hers also did the same. Her face registered another surprise. "Aren't you Shomari, my son?" she asked Hasara.

"Who?" Hasara's voice betrayed his surprise, "Me?"

She looked hard at him.

"I'm not Shomari," he said. "My name is Hasara!"

"Hasara!" she repeated, "Not Shomari?"

"No. Just Hasara."

"Hasara! Who's your mother?"

"I never knew her."

The woman burst into a bitter laugh. "It seems as if today is a miraculous day for me. God has thought it fit to show me wonders!"

Everyone of them looked at her in amazement.

"I think we should all sit down," suggested Kautipe, "and discuss these things like adults. What do you think, Sir?" He directed this question at Peterson.

They all sat. Peterson left them, went into an inner room and from there to the bathroom to wash and change. Then he came back, ordered all the stewards out and sat down with the rest, his gaze hardly leaving woman.

The silence that followed scared rather than reassured Nuru. It had never occurred to her that she would live to see such a day. A day on which she would be called upon to spread out before the eyes of others the pages of her past history - the history she would have rather forgotten. And there was no mistaking it. All the eyes were fixed on her, waiting for her story.

But how could one tell this story that would rather not be told? Tears began to form in her eyes. How could she unveil the tapestry of her demeaning past before this audience who would probably not understand?

In telling the story she would not be condemning only herself, but also the world with its hard options. These options which had led her into the shameful pit of disgrace. But how would her condemning the world profit this that had ears cocked waiting to hear her story? Why not change her mind and let everyone of them go on living as he or she had lived before? Would her story have the power to change the world, or make it change its merciless principles?

"Mother, we're waiting to hear your story," Rukia urged her. Nuru looked at her daughter sadly.

"It's a hard story to tell, my child," she whispered in a weak voice, still regretting the fact that she was being called upon to unveil the unpleasant.

Was it pleasant to tell her own children that after escaping from lady Pambo's whorehouse in Tabora she had hired out her body all the way to Mwanza? Her beauty had had a difference and every man desired her. They not only desired her but flaunted their money in front of her to tempt her, to urge her to make her choice and determine for herself who among them was the richest.

In those days, believing that a woman had to prove her skill in bed and turn the head of her bed partner, she had made sure that everyone of her customers got his money's worth. This made her famous and whenever her customers came in numbers that made her unable to cope she would escape. She was also envied by other prostitutes. One of them once came to her and told her in jest, "Tell us, sister, do you want to swallow the entire male population of the earth?" A strange question. "Look how they follow you in public and in private. Only you. How do you expect the rest of us to be able to make a living? And you do not have to sweat for your customers. Your beauty does the magic. Only we the poor have to struggle for survival in our rooms."

Despite her renown in the sordid world of prostitution, she had revolted against it all and hoped there would come a time when she would regain the dignity intended for a woman. Something in her conscience pricked her and kept reminding of the virtues of chastity, driving home the point that a woman was made for only one man. Her beauty and skill were intended for only one man. She realized from quite early that she was living in sin. This made her not value money in the same way as her fellow prostitutes did; nor did she manipulate men into giving her wonderful gifts

such as a house or a car. She feared such gifts would make her a permanent slave of sin.

She knew the day of her deliverance would come, but it was still far away, for every man who desired her also feared her. Everyone of them thought she was too beautiful for any man to control, and so much of a prostitute that no man could make her amend her ways. She read these thoughts in the eyes of her men and she pitied them more than she pitied herself. She believed that if there was a man who could read her thought and see the sincerity therein, he would consider himself the luckiest man alive.

Days had passed and then the day she had been waiting for dawned. It came in a manner she did not expect when she was staying in Mwanza. Nuru had decided to spend the day alone. Dressed in jeans and a light T-shirt, her hair standing thick on her head, she had wandered to the lake shore where she admired fishermen at work and the fishing vessels. If one happened to see her that evening one would have thought she was a foreigner touring the country; maybe an Arab, an Indian or an American. And this was what this old man sitting on a rock close to her thought.

"My name is Peter," the old man had said as Nuru approached and greeted him, "What's yours?"

"Nuru," she had replied.

They had engaged in a conversation. What attracted Nuru to the old man was his apparent prosperity. Every inch of him said so eloquently he was a man of means. Perhaps he was a highly placed government official; perhaps a rich businessman. Yet he seemed lonely, like one who had lost his beloved. Even his smile was full of sorrow and enlisted sympathy instead of delight.

"Where do you come from?" he had asked.

"I'm a resident of this town. And you?"

"You can say I'm rather new here. I'm simply on a business trip." From there they had gone to Mwanza Hotel. They had eaten and drank. The more they knew of each other, the more the old man's sorrow revealed itself. Nuru felt like pitying him. She forgot her modesty and drew him towards the bed.

It was in bed that she had discovered the source of his sorrow. He appeared older than his actual age. She spent two hours applying all the skill she knew to excite him but he remained limp.

"There is ten thousand shillings in the pocket," he had said all of a sudden, his voice betraying his humiliation. "Take it and go home. If you'll feel inclined, come back tomorrow for more conversation and drinks." The humiliation in his voice had made Nuru pity him all the more. She remembered her marriage to an old man like this who was cruel and cunning. But this one was kind and gentle. She had felt she had to do something to help him. Thus, instead of doing what she told him, she had laughed in a manner that comforted him. Then she had embarked on the task of trying to rouse the old man and spent the whole night doing it. It sent a pleasing sensation into him and close to dawn, he got an erection and Nuru was pleased to receive him into her.

At the end of the act, the old man had pranced about the room in joy. For a long time he hugged her and eyed her with wondering eyes. "You're marvellous," he had said in English. "You're so beautiful." Then he had reached for the locker in the room where he fished out a cheque book and made out one million shillings in her name. "I don't have enough cash on me," he had said, "Go and cash this cheque, and if you run into problems phone me in Dar es Salaam."

Nuru had taken the cheque and, laughing, torn it to shreds in front of his eyes.

"Listen," she had later told him. "I didn't mean this to be a

kind of business between you and me. If you think I'm a whore, then open the door and let me go."

This had surprised Peter. What woman today would miss this golden chance? How many women had in the past succeeded in robbing him of fortunes to blackmail him? They all had demanded much money to keep the secret of his impotency. But this one, who had fulfilled the desire of his heart, who had roused him into potency, why did she decline a reward? Or had she never seen that much money before? Did she think she would be robbing him? Didn't she know that he had millions which nobody spent and which waited for no heir? Had she known! Aloud he had told her: "I think I've got the woman I have been hunting for all my life. I'd like to marry you. And if possible, I'd like the wedding to take place tomorrow, so that the day after we'd be honeymooning in Paris or New York for a whole month before we return to Dar es Salaam. To whom do I give the dowry?"

"There'll be no dowry.."

And that was how it had been. It was a civil marriage and it was kept secret. They went abroad. Then they returned to their home in Dar es Salaam to begin their new life.

Peter's life changed. It was now full of joy and laughter. His face, which used to terrorize the servants with its sadness, now shone with laughter and kindness.

But to Nuru it was a new trial. Indeed, she enjoyed herself immensely during the day. But during the night, the task of rousing Peter sexually sapped her strength. Sometimes it would take a whole month before the old man had his erection.

And at such times she would suffer more than was good for any woman, but she went through it all for the sake of Peter whom she still pitied. She knew she was the only source of his confidence as a man and without her he would burn himself or wither in his self-pity.

Years passed.

Then doubts began to assail Nuru's mind. Despite the many years they had lived together Peter still had no heir. What was the use of a marriage if it was not graced with children? Since her work on Peter brought positive results only on very rare occasions, she knew it would take them ages before getting a child. That was when she decided to discard her dignity and status and tempt the head cook, Kautipe, into sleeping with her. After only a few days of the secret pleasures with the cook, she conceived.

After nine months, she gave birth to Peterson who was greatly loved by his father.

Two years after when she was still hunting for a second child from Kautipe, some freak gave her away to her husband. A big quarrel ensued. He insulted her and called her a prostitute day and night. She tried to endure the insults, not once mentioning how much she had suffered on his account in a bid to comfort him and instil confidence in him.

"How can a woman start explaining these things to a man?" she asked herself, "Nobody believes a woman even if she tells the truth." She endured the insults silently.

"A prostitute," he would charge. "A mere prostitute. I picked you up, when you were hiring yourself out like a bitch. I gave you the dignity deserving of a woman. But you remain a stinking prostitute, a bitch..."

When she could endure the insults no more she retired to her room then slunk out of the house without even a spare dress.

She wandered in far-away streets, bribing her way about with her body. When she had hired herself out and got sufficient funds, she travelled back to Mwanza.

She went to live with a prostitute she knew. All her friends were surprised to hear she had been divorced. They were even

more surprised to hear that she had run away from the house of the rich man empty-handed. They could not understand. She did not bother to explain anything. Who would have understood? Was it possible for any human being to understand another?

She tried to begin her life of prostitution afresh. This time her goal was to save enough money to enable her start afresh in a rural area, away from the sinful world of towns and cities. But things were difficult this time, especially as she had to re-learn the tricks from scratch. Above all she realized she was already pregnant. Her worries and anxiety had hidden this fact from her. Nevertheless she nursed the pregnancy until she gave birth to a baby girl.

She was a pretty child and Nuru realized from the start that she had inherited her looks and everything of hers, including sorrows that would accompany her beauty. Her life had taught her that the beauty of a woman could be a great source of misery, reducing her to a lamb in the midst of wolves.

She nursed the baby.

One day, at a bus stop, there came to her a young lady with a baby in her arms. She had asked Nuru to hold baby while she went to relieve herself. Nuru held the baby, but the young lady never came back. She took the baby to the police station. The policemen only laughed. Young ladies who dumped their babies were not something they were hearing for the first time.

They asked her to nurse the child while they investigated. Whatever the investigation they were conducting took months. Finally they handed a letter to Nuru advising her to consign the abandoned baby in the hands of the social welfare people. But the people at the Welfare Department asked her to keep the baby and nurse him while they were looking for ways to deal with the problem.

She nursed the baby for three years. She called him Shomari, and her own daughter Rukia. These two children of course did not understand the difficulty she had in bringing them up. They lived happily together, laughing, playing and sleeping together, embracing each other like twins.

When she could no longer cope with the burden of bringing up the two children she took the boy to the Social Welfare office in Dodoma and abandoned him there, leaving him to the mercies of the officials. Then she journeyed back to Tabora. She stayed there for a while, fighting for her survival before going back to Mwanza.

Things continued to be difficult for her. Her life seemed to deteriorate. She deplored having to live immorally in front of her daughter whom she knew would take this to be the natural course of events. She was not prepared to suffer the humiliation of seeing her daughter having to go through the rigours of immorality to earn a living while the world punished her as it had done her mother. She had done nothing wrong to deserve such demeaning.

Then came the day she had to overcome her compassion for the child and abandon her. Yes, she abandoned the child, abandoned the town, abandoned the society and longed to abandon the world altogether. She decided to escape from all the people she knew and begin her life anew in a village. And she had been living there until recently, when Kautipe turned up.

And now she was back in the city. She was now in front of those very people she had not wished to meet again in her life. They were all eagerly awaiting her story. But how could she tell it while it had better remain untold? If today they failed to understand her, who would ever? Since when had one human being understood

another? Since when had the world begun to understand its inhabitants?

As she asked herself these questions she fixed the seated foursome with a look of sympathy.